

**The Development
of
Sport in County Westmeath
1850-1905**

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Abstract

This thesis examines the development of sport in county Westmeath between 1850 and 1905. The subject is an unexplored one in the Irish context but by extensive use of contemporary newspapers and the census enumerators' household schedule forms of 1901, an attempt is made to re-create the sporting and recreational world of Victorian and early Edwardian Westmeath. The thesis is organised thematically in that selected sports are examined individually on a chronological basis within each chapter. The development of a club institution, the financing of the activity and the development of a competitive structure within the sporting discipline are key issues explored. The study is inclusive in that a wide range of sports is examined, as well as the recreational habits and social networks of the different socio-occupational classes. The role of sport in the lives of women and the importance of the military in recreational development are also explored.

Quantification, and classification is an essential feature of this study. The number of events organised are measured, a sample of individual participants in the different sports are identified and are classified into one of four different social classes. As a result of this methodology a key finding that emerges from the study is the extent to which sporting involvement was a product of the class structure of Westmeath society.

The importance of sports participation to the socialisation process is also explored and the manner in which sport became a conduit for socialisation is documented. In its entirety, the thesis makes a major contribution to the history of sport and social interaction in Ireland, and demonstrates how in the context of Westmeath, sport developed as a major focus for people's lives.

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Abbreviations

AAA	Amateur Athletic Association
AGM	Annual General Meeting
CBS	Crime Branch Special
CWGC	County Westmeath Golf Club
FL	Freemasons' Library
GAA	Gaelic Athletic Association
GGC	Garrison Golf Club
HML	Her Majesty's Lieutenant
ICA	Irish Cycling Association
INHSC	Irish National Hunt Steeplechase Committee
INF	Irish National Federation
INL	Irish National League
IRB	Irish Republican Brotherhood
MFH	Master of the Foxhounds
<i>MR</i>	<i>Midland Reporter</i>
NA	National Archives
NLI	National Library of Ireland
RIC	Royal Irish Constabulary
RIF	Royal Irish Fusiliers
UIL	United Irish League
VO	Valuation Office
WCL	Westmeath County Library
WE	<i>Westmeath Examiner</i>
WG	<i>Westmeath Guardian</i>
WHCFR	Westmeath Hunt Club Financial Records
WHCMB	Westmeath Hunt Club Minute Books.
<i>WI</i>	<i>Westmeath Independent</i>
<i>WN</i>	<i>Westmeath Nationalist</i>

Introduction

Aim of study

The overarching aim of this study is to examine and explain how sport worked in county Westmeath in the period between 1850-1905. This is achieved by examining a number of common themes, where possible, in each chapter. Quantification is a key feature of each chapter where the frequency with which events were organised is measured. The club formed the institutional basis around which sport was organised and therefore an in-depth profile of a number of clubs forms a key feature of individual chapters. Clubs are composed of individual members and each chapter will also contain a socio-occupational profile of club membership and participants in the individual sports. Financial viability and access to an appropriate playing arena were crucial to individual club and sports survival. Although availability of financial information and account material is limited, when possible the financial management of selected clubs is evaluated.

The temporal boundaries of the study were determined by events of significance in the political and social history of the county. The cataclysmic events of the Great Famine had concluded by 1850 and the year marks an appropriate starting point on any study on aspects of the post-Famine situation. The decision to extend the study to 1905 was influenced by events less calamitous but important in the social history of the county. The last years of the century saw a revival of political nationalism that was accompanied by a growth in cultural nationalism particularly in the period between 1900-05. This period witnessed the re-emergence of the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) as a viable organisation; this development provided an alternative sporting outlet for certain classes and in the process led to the decline of popular cricket. The period between 1900-05 also saw important developments at the Mullingar racecourse, which was enclosed and became a gate-money meet. This meant that horseracing at Mullingar became commercialised and commodified, the only event of this type within the county. Any study of nineteenth century sport that purports to be comprehensive could not exclude these developments.

The period of study covers the time when what historians refer to as a revolution in sport occurred. Levels of player and spectator participation rose dramatically. The

sexual and social composition of those involved widened. Rules of play were codified and management structures established. Clubs proliferated and sport became increasingly commercialised. By 1900, the size and character of the world of sport had been transformed.¹ This study provides an in depth examination of the implication of these developments for the county of Westmeath.

The socio-economic context of Westmeath

Westmeath, located in the Irish midlands, was a county of 454,104 statute acres that formed 2.2 per cent of the total area of Ireland in1901². This included 21,797 statute acres of rivers and lakes, 39,336 acres of turf bog and marshland, as well as 7,758 statute acres of woods and plantations.³ This diversity produced a natural environment that was considered by Lewis to be ‘highly picturesque’ and ranked behind only Kerry, Wicklow, Fermanagh and Waterford in order of beauty.⁴ It was also one that was particularly suitable for the pursuit of recreational activities.

Census period	Total population	Male	Female	Decrease	Percentage decrease
1851	111,407	56,095	55,312	29,893	21.15
1861	90,879	46,218	44,661	20,528	18.42
1871	78,432	39,804	38,628	12,447	13.69
1881	71,798	36,478	35,320	6,634	8.46
1891	65,109	33,927	31,182	6,689	9.32
1901	58,433	30,093	28,340	6,676	10.25

Source: *Census of population, 1901.*

Table 1: Population change in county Westmeath, 1851-1901.

The demographic trend of the county over the period of this study is one of continuous decline as illustrated in Table 1. In 1841, the population of the county peaked at 141,300 but following the Great Famine years had decreased to 111,407 by 1851.⁵ This began a decline that continued to 1901.

¹ Neil Tranter, ‘The chronology of organised sport in nineteenth-century Scotland: a regional study, I- patterns’, in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 7, 2, 1990, 188.
²*Census of Ireland, 1901. Part 1. Area, houses and population: also the ages, civil or conjugal condition, occupations, birthplaces, religion and education of the people. volume 1. Province of Leinster, No. 10. County of Westmeath*, [Cd. 847. IX]. 1901. vii.
³ *Ibid*, 1.
⁴ S. Lewis, *Topographical dictionary of Ireland*, ii, London, 1837, 223.
⁵ *Census of Ireland, 1901. 1.*

The population decline was accompanied by some change in its spatial organisation as people became more concentrated in small towns. Pre-Famine Westmeath was one of ten Irish counties that had between 10 and 15 per cent of its population resident in small towns but in 1851 this had changed and more than 15 per cent of its population was small town based.⁶ In 1901, the percentage of small town residents had increased still further to over 25 per cent.⁷ Overall the percentage had increased from 17.52 per cent in 1851 to 26.13 per cent in 1901.⁸ The distribution of these small towns is illustrated in Figure 1⁹. While the majority of the population was Roman Catholic (92.0 per cent), there was a substantial Protestant minority of 8.0 per cent.¹⁰

The two principal urban centres were Athlone and Mullingar and both of these had a number of shared economic and administrative characteristics. Both were important garrison and market towns, with the former function more important in Athlone and the latter dominant in Mullingar. The Victoria Barracks in Athlone was ‘adequate for 3,000 men’ and the extensive military barracks in Mullingar was capable of holding 1,000 soldiers.¹¹ The recreational habits of the men based in these barracks and their role in supporting and promoting sport will be examined throughout the study. The population of both towns fluctuated, although this variation was in part due to changes in the number of inhabitants in the institutions of state based in both towns.¹² Athlone, particularly in the later decades of the century, experienced the greater stability of population as can be seen in Table 2.¹³

	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901
Athlone	6,199	5,902	6,565	6,755	6,742	6,617
Mullingar	4,817	5,375	5,103	4,787	5,323	4,500

Source: *Census of population, 1901.*

Table 2: Population change in Mullingar and Athlone, 1851-1901.

⁶ Stephen A. Royle, ‘Small towns in Ireland, 1841-1851’ in Howard B. Clarke, Jacinta Prunty and Mark Hennessy (eds.) *Multidisciplinary essays in honour of Angret Simms*, Dublin, 2004, 544-9.

⁷ *Census of Ireland, 1901*, 553.

⁸ *Ibid*, 557-8.

⁹ Small towns in this instance are defined as those that had a population of less than 10,000.

¹⁰ *Census of Ireland, 1901*, vii.

¹¹ *Slater’s directory, 1892*, 16.

¹² Apart from the military barracks both towns had union workhouses and Mullingar also was the location of the District Lunatic Asylum.

¹³ W.E. Vaughan and A.J. Fitzpatrick (eds.), *Irish historical statistics: population 1821-1971*, Dublin, 1978, 32.

Industrial employment of the type common in Britain at this time, with two Athlone based exceptions, was unknown in the county. The Athlone Woollen Mills, established in 1859, was the chief provider of factory-based employment. In 1881, the factory employed 200 people and reportedly turned out 600 yards of cloth weekly to meet the demands of English, Scottish, French and American markets. In 1885, 350 were employed in the mill and in 1892, 400, mostly women, were employed.¹⁴ Athlone Saw Mills, established by Laurence Wilson in the early 1870s, also offered industrial employment until it ceased to be a viable concern in 1894.¹⁵

The Westmeath agricultural economy was a specialist one. Only Meath was more important as a grazing county in Ireland, with the larger farmers concentrating on the fattening of dry cattle and sheep. The essential feature of this enterprise was that the farmer sold, on a regular basis, for a cash return at least one of his commodities, at a recognised market or fair.¹⁶ This branch of agricultural production expanded dramatically in the county during the period of this study. The number of dry cattle increased from 68,588 in 1851 to 92,564 in 1871 and to 101,967 in 1901.¹⁷ Fifty-three per cent of all dry cattle in 1901 were two years or older, while 30 per cent were between one and two years. There was a similar increase in the number of sheep, which rose from 82,000 to 140,000 between 1850 and 1900.¹⁸ Westmeath livestock farmers were fattening graziers who purchased cattle at the end of their store grazing period from farmers in Munster and Connaught and from within the county, fattened them for six to twelve months and sold them for slaughter, when they were between three and four years old.

The basic cause of this expansion in animal husbandry was the sustained upward trend of prices. Prices were particularly buoyant from 1869 to 1883 and after 1900

¹⁴ John Burke, 'Victorian Athlone, the struggle to modernise an Irish provincial town', unpublished M. A. Thesis, Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology, Galway, 2004, 96-100.

¹⁵ Ibid, 100-101.

¹⁶ David S. Jones, 'The cleavage between graziers and peasants in the land struggle, 1890-1910' in Samuel Clark and J. S. Donnelly jr. (ed.), *Irish peasants, violence and political unrest, 1780-1914*, Wisconsin and Manchester, 1983, 374.

¹⁷ *Agricultural statistics of Ireland*, 1871, lxxviii; *Agricultural statistics of Ireland*, 1902, *General abstracts showing the acreage under crops and the number and description of livestock in each county and province, 1901-1902*, [Cd 1263], 661, 14.

¹⁸ *Farming since the Famine: Irish farm statistics 1847-1996*, Dublin, 1997, 200-201.

though the upward movement of dry-cattle and sheep prices was broken intermittently by sharp falls. The grazing business encountered periods of crisis such as those of 1866-8, 1884-7 and 1891-6, which inflicted serious loss, although not all cattle farmers were affected in the same manner. The general upward trend in beef and store cattle prices stemmed from the growing demand for meat by an expanding urban population in Britain and Ireland.¹⁹ The November fair at Mullingar was the main venue for the sale of Westmeath livestock. At the conclusion of that fair, the railway line to Dublin was packed with trucks, full of cattle, horses and sheep bound for Britain.²⁰

The system of farming involved the grazing of large numbers of dry cattle and sheep over extensive ranges of grassland with the practitioners known as graziers or ranchers. Normally, the rancher's land consisted of multiple holdings, sometimes scattered throughout the county. Grazing farms covered broad expanses of pasture and usually ranged from about 150 or 200 acres to 1,000 acres or more, far exceeding in size most other types of agricultural enterprises.²¹ In Westmeath, the number of large farms in the county facilitated grazing. In 1901, the county had 543 farms between 100 and 200 acres in size: 282 between 200 and 500 acres and 47 in excess of 500 acres.²² The nature of the Westmeath economy also meant that the county had a high proportion of un-tenanted land at the end of the century.²³ The landlords held some of this in their own hands; others they let to large graziers. In the post-1881 era, such lettings were frequently arranged on the 'eleven month system', which lettings were exempt from the fair rent fixing terms of the 1881 Land Act.²⁴

The nature of the economy is important in the context of this study as it created a number of wealthy individual farmers and estate proprietors who invested some of their finance in their recreational activities and also provided the patronage to support

¹⁹ Jones, *Cleavage*, 375-8.

²⁰ *WG*, 14 Nov. 1872.

²¹ David Seth Jones, *Graziers, land reform and political conflict in Ireland*, Washington D.C., 1995, 15.

²² *Agricultural statistics of Ireland, 1902*, 20.

²³ *Return of untenanted lands in rural districts, distinguishing demesnes on which there is a mansion, showing: rural districts and electoral divisions; townland; area in statute acres; poor law valuation; names of occupiers as in valuation lists*. H.C. 1906, C.177, 182-92.

²⁴ Terence Dooley, *Sources for the history of the landed estates in Ireland*, Dublin, 2000, 14.

the recreational activities of others. Captain Butler commented on this prosperity in his monthly reports on the state of Westmeath in December 1882. According to Butler

Grazing is the industry of this country; every grass farmer and every small farmer whose land will carry grass, lives by cattle...Mr. Vize, manager of the National Bank here, told me that in the three months ending 30 November his bank had received deposits amounting to £30,000 and that bills to the amount of £25,000 had been taken up. ...Such a state of business is hitherto unknown; it is all graziers' money.²⁵

Almost a decade later, the continued prosperity of the Mullingar district enabled the shareholding for the Westmeath (Mullingar) Racing Company in 1890 to be over subscribed by 550 £1 shares.²⁶

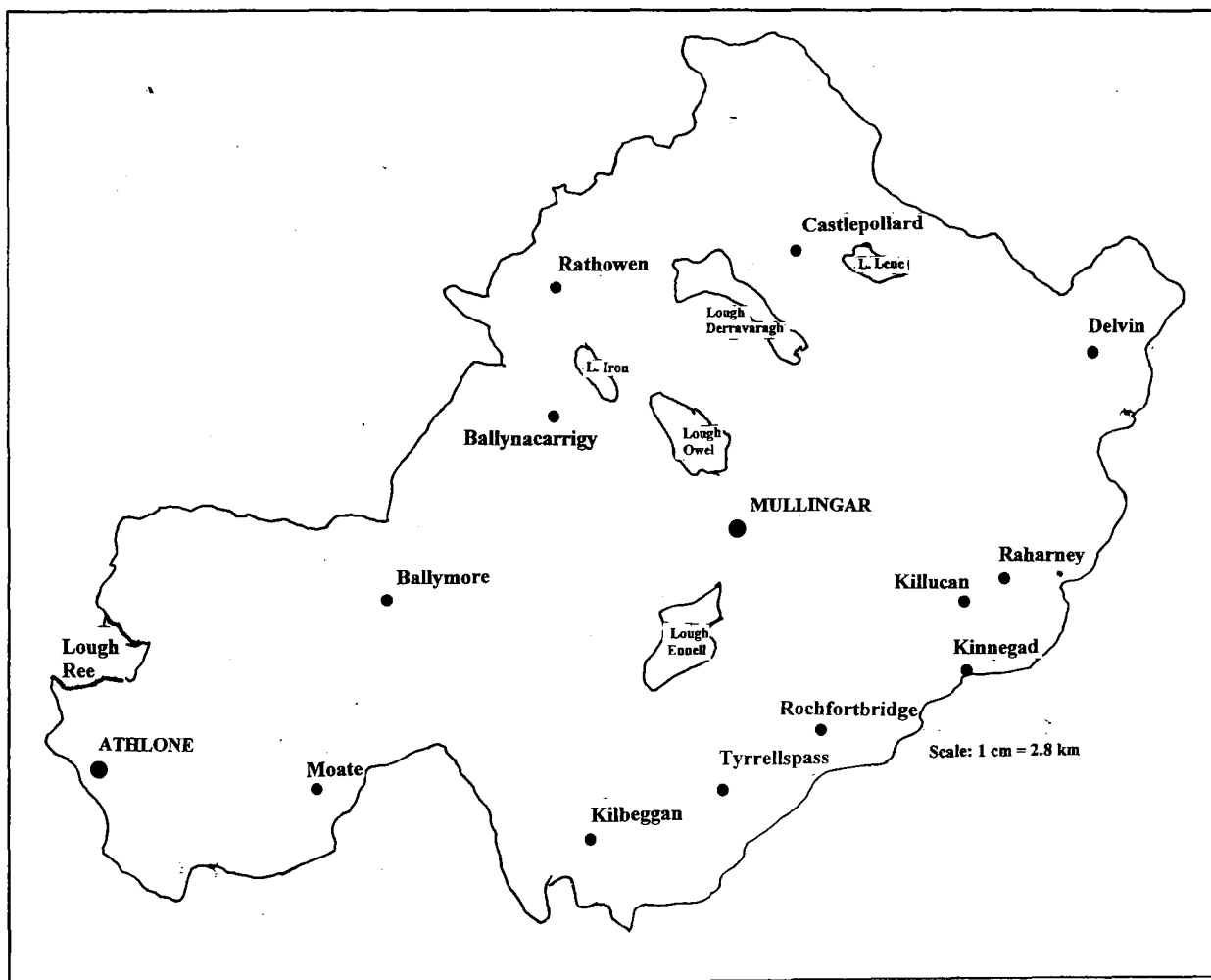


Figure 1: Westmeath and its principal towns in 1901.

²⁵ National Archives (NA), CSO papers, report of Captain Butler, December 1882, Registered papers, 1888/20736.

²⁶ *WE*, 15 Feb. 1890.

Infrastructural advance: railway development

The development of a rail network was the most important infrastructural improvement that took place within the county in the period under review and was important to the development of the type of economic activity described in the preceding paragraphs. The Midland Great Western Railway was the third largest in Ireland and linked the county with Galway to the west and Dublin to the east. Work on the line commenced in 1846 and Kinnegad in Westmeath was reached on 6 December 1847. The connection to Mullingar was completed in 1848 and rail traffic to Dublin commenced on 2 October 1848.²⁷ This extension offered the prospect of ‘civilisation, trade and commerce’ to the town according to the *Westmeath Guardian*.²⁸ In 1849, Parliament approved the plan to extend the line to Galway and the directors immediately entered into a contract with William Dargan for the construction of the entire line from Mullingar to Galway, an enterprise that required several major engineering works most notably the substantial bridge over the river Shannon at Athlone. The line was completed on 20 July 1851 when the last rail was laid on the Shannon bridge at Athlone and was opened for business on 1 August.²⁹ Throughout the 1850s Mullingar’s railway connections continued to expand. In November 1855, the line connecting Mullingar to Longford was completed, followed by the Inny Junction branch line to Cavan. The Mullingar-Longford connection was extended to Sligo by 1862 and a branch line to Clara in Offaly was opened in 1863.³⁰ The completed MGWR system covered 538 miles and was completed in the 1890s with extensions from the Galway line to Clifden and from Wexford to Malinbeg on Achill Island.³¹ This brought Mullingar into direct communication with every part of Ireland. The Cavan line facilitated connection with the northern parts of Ireland and the Clara junction with GSW line enabled southern connection to be made.³²

Athlone with its central location also developed as an important railway confluence. Apart from the MGWR line, the opening of the Great South Western Rail line to

²⁷ Fergus Mulligan, *One hundred and fifty years of Irish railways*, Dublin, 1990, 67-9.

²⁸ Ruth Illingworth, ‘Transport, 1806-1905’ in Mary Farrell (ed.), *Mullingar: Essays on the history of a midlands town in the nineteenth century*, Mullingar, 2002, 140. *WG*, 5 Oct. 1848.

²⁹ Ernest Shepherd, *The Midland Great Western Railway of Ireland: an illustrated history*, Leicester, 1994, 17.

³⁰ Illingworth, *Transport*, 141.

³¹ Kevin O’Connor, *Ironing the land: the coming of the railways to Ireland*, Dublin, 1999, 84-7.

³² *Thom’s directory*, 1897, 1247.

Tullamore in 1859 provided links with the south. The nominally independent Great Northern & Western Railway Company opened an Athlone to Roscommon line in December 1859 and connected to Castlerea by March 1860. Eventually this route was extended to Claremorris and Castlebar in 1866 and Ballina in 1873.³³ Westmeath natives had nationwide access by rail at the end of the century. In 1897 there were four through trains each day from Dublin to Galway and Sligo was served by three lines from Dublin as well as an additional train from Mullingar.³⁴ This network also facilitated internal communications. Despite the county's size, eleven towns or villages possessed a rail station. The social and economic implications of this freedom of movement were immense and its significant for the development of sport will be considered throughout the study.

Irish sports history: the contemporary position

In contrast to Britain, the historical study of Irish sport has received limited attention from historians, with notable pioneering exceptions. The disadvantaged status of Irish sports history was illustrated with the publication of the latest edition in the new history of Ireland series that examines the period between 1921-84.³⁵ In addition to the political history, the work contains chapters on the economy, literature in Irish, literature in English, the visual arts, two chapters on music, the mass media, education, emigration and women. The role and importance of sport is however ignored. Studies on the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) dominate the genre with their main theme concerned with evaluating the association from a political perspective. This approach is best exhibited in the work of the Australian historian W. F. Mandle. In his initial exploration of the GAA, Mandle based the success of the organisation on the support of the Catholic Church and its 'avowedly nationalist, ostentatiously Irish' stance.³⁶ Later, he adopted a more inclusive approach to explain the success of the GAA and placed its development in the broader context of contemporary sporting developments. Although the GAA was 'founded, manipulated and sustained, first by the IRB, later by the nationalist movement as a whole' according to Mandle, it was unable to escape the wider influences that came from its

³³ O'Connor, *Ironing the land*, 83. The GN & WR was heavily backed by the MGWR.

³⁴ Ibid. 90. All these trains served Mullingar.

³⁵ J. R. Hill (ed.), *A new history of Ireland 1921-1984*, Oxford, 2004.

³⁶ W.F. Mandle, 'The I.R.B. and the beginnings of the Gaelic Athletic Association' in *Irish Historical Studies*, xx 80, 1977, 422, 432.

being located within the United Kingdom. 'The sports revolution that codified and organised so many traditional games, and invented new ones, was British, even an English movement'. He also gave some consideration to its attractions as a purely sporting organisation. From 1905, he suggested that Gaelic games had been sufficiently modified and codified to become 'genuinely popular' and no longer simply 'an adjunct to revolutionary nationalism'.³⁷

In 1987, Mandle published what one commentator considered to be the most important work ever produced on the history of the GAA. However this work was a very narrowly focused history in that it aimed to examine the connections between the GAA and the evolution of nationalist politics in the period 1884-1924.³⁸ Only passing reference is made to its wider relationship to sporting development within the United Kingdom, 'a revolution in games-playing and games organisation that has proved to be one of Victorian England's most enduring legacies'.³⁹ The work is a 'history of the radical IRB as much as it is a history of the GAA', and one in which the overall importance of the IRB to the development of the GAA is overstated.⁴⁰ Mandle's emphasis on the contribution of the IRB to the GAA was taken to extreme lengths in an earlier work when he claimed 'there was not a man who meant anything in the organisation of the GAA who was not of the Brotherhood'.⁴¹

Academic studies of the GAA have contributed to Irish political historiography; the perspective is that of the political historian, the result is our understanding of the development of Irish nationalism has been enhanced whilst our understanding of the history of Irish sport remains relatively uninformed. Other sports have also received academic analysis because of their impact on politics. Hunting qualified in an essay that 'explores a neglected aspect of the Land War, namely the campaign to stop landlords and magistrates from hunting across tenanted land...' The essay locates the protest within 'the larger context of the Land League's ideology and strategy during

³⁷ W.F. Mandle, 'The GAA and popular culture, 1884-1924' in O. MacDonagh, W. F. Mandle and P. Travers (eds.), *Irish culture and Irish nationalism*, London, 1993, 105, 111.

³⁸ W. F. Mandle, *The Gaelic Athletic Association & Irish nationalist politics, 1884-1924*, Dublin 1987.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 13-14.

⁴⁰ Mike Cronin, *Sport and Nationalism in Ireland, Gaelic games, soccer and Irish identity since 1884*, Dublin, 1999, 100. Cronin considers this to be the most important work ever produced that details the history of the GAA. For an in-depth discussion of current GAA historiography see *ibid*. 94-111.

⁴¹ W.F. Mandle, 'Sport as politics: the Gaelic Athletic Association 1884-1916', in *Sport in history*, R. Cashman and M. McKernan (eds.), Brisbane, 1980, 114.

the last months of its legal existence'.⁴² Hunting in Queen's county was examined in a similar context.⁴³ Cricket received its initial academic probe when its connection to Irish nationalism was explored and it was used as a vehicle 'to demonstrate a sporting-nationalist dichotomy'.⁴⁴

The lack of a general survey on the development of popular sport 'in the crucial Victorian era' and the political partiality of the research has allowed, as Paul Rouse has pointed out, 'a series of stereotypes and caricatures to prosper, while distortions of history have blossomed as inherited truths', a development compounded by the 'fact that respected historians have adopted these distortions into the mainstream of historical discourse'.⁴⁵ In this context, the words of Conor Cruise O'Brien written in 1960 are still valid. He considered that the GAA's 'importance has perhaps not even yet been fully recognised...the tribute which it has not received is the more serious one of sustained critical attention ... intelligent and, as far as possible, disinterested and dispassionate'.⁴⁶

Whilst the GAA may be examined by historians from a limited political perspective, other sports have been totally excluded from the arenas of academia, although the balance has been somewhat redressed with the recent publication of a history of association football in pre-partition Ireland and a volume of essays that provide a useful synthesis of current research by historians and sociologists on the history and significance of sport in Irish society.⁴⁷ The result is that our understanding of sport in its social and economic context is diminished. A recent comment on the state of our understanding of GAA affairs could be applied equally to any sporting discipline in Ireland. Mike Cronin in an article in *High Ball*, in what might be considered a charter on the future direction of Irish sports history, asked

⁴² L. P. Curtis JR, 'Stopping the Hunt, 1881-1882: an aspect of the Irish Land War', C. H. E. Philpin (ed.), in *Nationalism and popular protest in Ireland*, Cambridge, 1987, 349-401.

⁴³ J. W. H. Carter, *The Land War and its leaders in Queen's county, 1879-82*, Portlaoise, 1994.

⁴⁴ Richard Davis, 'Irish Cricket and Nationalism', in *Sporting Traditions*, X, No. 2, 1994, 77-96.

⁴⁵ Paul Rouse, 'Why Irish historians have ignored sport: a note' in *The History Review*, XIV, 2003, 68.

⁴⁶ Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Foreword' in *The shaping of modern Ireland*, London, 1960, 16.

⁴⁷ Neal Garnham, *Association football and society in pre-partition Ireland*, Belfast, 2004; Alan Bairner (ed.), *Sport and the Irish: histories, identities and issues*, Dublin, University College Dublin Press, 2005

Well what do we know about Gaelic games? Not too much really. We have an awareness of men like Cusack or Davin, but we know little about the men who devoted their lives to the Association. We don't really know how the games spread in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century or why some counties are traditionally stronger in football than they are in hurling. We have little or no information on the men who have played Gaelic games, their social background, occupations, family ties and so on. Unlike most other countries we have no awareness of how the games were taken into the schools ... And then there's the grounds themselves: how and why were they built, why were they named as they are, and how have they changed? ... we have little or no information about the use of rail travel to games, the links between the Association and the railway companies, the regular coach trips...And what about before and after the game, the social scene that has so fruitfully attached itself to matches? ... How central have pubs been in underpinning the success of Gaelic spectacle?⁴⁸

Source material

An eclectic range of source material has been used in the construction of this thesis. These included newspapers, parliamentary papers, private papers, material produced by government agencies and a variety of contemporary printed accounts. Two groups of sources in particular were important. Newspapers, as valuable repositories of historical information and accurate barometers of social activity, formed the chief source for the study.⁴⁹ The research was based on an examination of four Westmeath newspapers published weekly. These newspapers covered all spectrums of political opinion within the county and provided a comprehensive coverage of the geographic totality of the area. The *Westmeath Independent* concentrated on happenings in the southern part of the county and especially in Athlone.⁵⁰ The *Westmeath Guardian* was the newspaper of the unionist and conservative community and its coverage was more focused on Mullingar. In 1882, a nationalist newspaper, the *Westmeath Examiner* was first published and in 1891 the *Westmeath Nationalist* added to the

⁴⁸ Mike Cronin, 'Writing the history of the GAA', in *High Ball: the official GAA monthly magazine*, 6, 6, June 2003, 53.

⁴⁹ For a general review of the importance of the newspaper and other media to sport in Victorian times see Mike Huggins, *The Victorians and sport*, London, 2004, 141-66. For a more specific examination in an Irish context see Paul Rouse, 'Sport and Ireland in 1881' in Bairner (ed.), *Sport and the Irish*, 7-21.

⁵⁰ The *Westmeath Guardian* was published between 8 January 1835 and 19 October 1928. The *Westmeath Independent* was first published in 1846 and is still published today. The *Westmeath Examiner* was first published in 23 September 1882 and it also still survives whilst the *Westmeath Nationalist and Midland Reporter* began publication on 30 April 1891 as an anti-Parnellite, pro-clerical newspaper to provide an alternative voice to the pro-Parnellite, anti-clerical *Westmeath Examiner*. It continued as the *Midland Reporter and Westmeath Nationalist* from 23 September 1897 until 21 September 1939 when it ceased publication. With the exception of the *Westmeath Independent* where some issues are missing for the early 1880s a continuous run of the other papers was available and they were interrogated for the purpose of this study.

comprehensiveness of local news coverage. As the century progressed, the amount of international news decreased, as local news coverage improved. The quality of sports coverage became more comprehensive and with four newspapers examined the picture that emerges in this work is as detailed as possible given the nature of source material available. Newspapers carried advertisements for sports events and equipment, reports on events and club meetings, letters on controversies arising from sporting occasions, match reports and news of Westmeath athletic and equine performances in events outside the county. Obituaries and reportage on individuals who migrated were also useful as a source of establishing social and community networks. The absence of contemporary club minute books is compensated by the frequency with which club meetings featured in newspaper reports. Minute books quite often only record decisions made with no note made of the issues debated. In contrast, newspapers contain more in-depth coverage.

A difficulty associated with reliance on newspapers, as a source, is the problem presented by under-reporting of events and the consequent impact this has on quantification. Despite the use of a large sample of papers, this was a problem, especially in a situation where clubs were transitory and where newspaper reportage ranked low in the priorities of club administrators. Reliance on newspaper reports may also overstate the ephemeral nature of clubs. Under-reporting is easily established but any attempt to establish its extent is fraught with difficulties. This can be illustrated using cricket as an example. There is evidence that some clubs did not forward any reports of their activities to the local press. The Delvin Cricket Club in 1886, for example, organised an athletic sports in which one event was confined to athletes who had played against the host club during the cricket season. Five members of different cricket clubs competed in this event and included representatives of two clubs, Rosmead and Sheepstown that never featured in newspaper reports.⁵¹ In the same season the Delvin club's playing activities went unreported. The Westmeath County Cricket Club in an end of season report claimed to have won all five games contested in 1887 but newspapers only carried accounts of two of these games.⁵² In September 1893, Cloughan CC had contested seven games but only four of these were

⁵¹ *WG*, 5 Nov. 1886.

⁵² *WG*, 2 Sept. 1887.

reported.⁵³ The Ranelagh School Cricket team played seven cricket games in 1897 according to the headmaster in his end of year address. None of these games merited newspaper reportage.⁵⁴ Big House games also went unreported. Based on the above, an estimate of under-reporting of at least 20 per cent of cricket matches played may be conservative. Football games and hurling matches experienced the same phenomenon. Despite the possibility of under-reporting of games, this survey is as comprehensive as possible given the singular nature of available source material on sports coverage.

The second major source used was the manuscript census enumerator returns of 1901. Bureaucrats and revolutionaries have destroyed the earlier returns and so this study was limited to the use of the 1901 forms. These returns give information at the level of the individual household and their importance as a historical source, rather than a resource for genealogists, has received greater appreciation in recent years.⁵⁵ Form A provides the core information used in this study to establish the socio-occupational backgrounds of the men and women active in organized club and competitive sport in Victorian and early Edwardian Westmeath.⁵⁶

Methodology

A complete weekly survey was done of the four newspapers the *Westmeath Guardian*, the *Westmeath Nationalist*, the *Westmeath Examiner* and the *Westmeath Independent* over the period of their publication. The popularity of the various sporting disciplines was established by conducting this fine-grained analysis. Annual aggregates of events held and of combinations active in team sports and matches played were compiled. The methodology used was similar to that used by Neil Tranter in his examination of organized sport in central Scotland.⁵⁷ Names of individuals active in the various sporting disciplines were extracted from the newspapers and databases were then

⁵³ *WE*, 9 Sept. 1893

⁵⁴ *WI*, 25 Dec. 1897.

⁵⁵ See in particular Peter Hart's, *The I.R.A. & its enemies: violence and community in Cork, 1916-1923*, Oxford, 1998. Hart used information from the 1911 census forms to establish the social composition of the IRA in Cork. See also Michael Farry, *The aftermath of revolution: Sligo, 1921-23*, Dublin, 2000, who compiled similar re-constructions.

⁵⁶ Form A recorded the household data, giving details of individual persons in each house, including their names, their relationship to the heads of households, place of birth, age, marital status, religious profession, occupation, education and ability to speak the Irish language.

⁵⁷ Tranter, 'Chronology', 188-203.

constructed containing the personal details of the individuals. Information extracted from the 1901 census enumerators' forms provided the main source of information for this process but information on individuals active earlier in the period was compiled from a range of directories, aristocratic and gentry guidebooks and Church of Ireland parish registers. The *Racing Calendar* was a useful source for the chapter on horseracing in the county. This source was especially valuable as each year a list of the names and addresses of subscribers to the annual was included. The majority of the addresses for owners were extracted from this source. The journal *Sport* also published an annual list of horses in training in Ireland and this included the names and addresses of trainers as well the age and identity of horses based at the stables, the jockeys attached and the names of the owners with horses at the stables.⁵⁸

This information was then used to classify the participants identified into one of four social classes similar to those used by Tranter in his Scottish study.⁵⁹ This classification was in turn based, with minor amendments, on the system of classification devised by Armstrong.⁶⁰ Social class A incorporates the gentry and aristocracy, men with private income, army officers, the more substantial employers of labour and the members of the high status professions. Class B comprises middle-class white-collar employees, farmers of at least five-acres and employers of labour. Skilled workers are represented in class C. The semi-skilled of class D including farm labourers and the un-skilled of class E, as used by Armstrong and Tranter, are amalgamated for the purpose of this study. The compilers of the census of 1901 considered that the majority of general labourers could 'be assumed to be agricultural labourers although not having returned themselves as such'.⁶¹ The information is presented in tabular form throughout the thesis, with the letter U used to denote unidentified personnel.

The spatial dimension of club development is examined by the construction of maps where relevant to illustrate the distribution of venue and club location.

⁵⁸ *Sport*, 23 Dec. 1893,

⁵⁹ Neil Tranter, 'The social and occupational structure of organized sport in Central Scotland during the nineteenth century' in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 4, 1, 1987, 308-9.

⁶⁰ W.A. Armstrong, 'The use of information about occupations' in E.A. Wrigley (ed.), *Nineteenth Century Society*, Cambridge, 1992, 191-310.

⁶¹ *Census of Ireland*, 1901, 64.

Thesis organisation

This thesis is organised thematically with each chapter dealing with the development of an individual sport or sports. Chapter One examines the development of hunting within the county and features a detailed profile of the subscribers to the Westmeath Hunt Club at three roughly equidistant dates. This fine-grained analysis of a key element of elite culture examines the management, organisation and financing of the sport and explores the crucial role played by the Master of the Foxhounds (MFH) in the sport's infrastructure. In the context of an exploration of an aspect of gentry culture, the development of polo is examined and its role in providing an exclusive sporting context for an elite group is investigated.

Chapter Two presents a detailed analysis of the development of horse racing structured around two in-depth studies of race meets within the county. The close initial links between steeplechasing and hunting will be explored and through the medium of the case studies the changing nature of racing will be identified. The changes included greater codification; the establishment of centralised authority, greater commercialisation, a broadening of the participant base and important changes in the classes who were central to the organisation of race meetings at the county level. The emergence of an identifiable Westmeath racing community in the 1890s will also be explored.

Chapter Three examines the introduction of three new commercial sports and in some respects continues the investigation of elite culture of the earlier chapters. The analysis reveals the exclusivity of lawn tennis and golf. These sports also provided an outlet for social groups who were recreationally disenfranchised in earlier decades. Golf and tennis provided opportunities for women, and cycling for the middle-classes and in particular for members of the Royal Irish Constabulary to partake in the recreational experience.

Chapter Four examines the growth of cricket in the county and the empirical evidence produced challenges previous assumptions regarding the social exclusivity of cricket and its national decline in the early 1880s. Cricket was the most popular sport in the county in the 1880s and later, enabling cross-class participation and at the end of the century had developed as a recreational outlet dominated by the farm labouring class.

Chapter Five deals with the introduction of the GAA to the county and argues that in its initial manifestation in the county, it was essentially seen as a recreational activity, rather than as a means of establishing a nationalist identity. The focus is on the individuals and clubs involved and it is suggested that the initial decline of the organisation in the county came about through the failure of the internal management structure, the lack of clearly codified and understood rules and the unwillingness of individual clubs to accept the decisions of regulatory authorities. In this context, the growth of soccer is examined particularly in Athlone where it benefited from the fall-out from the internal GAA disputes and from the popularity of the sport with the military garrisons in the town. The limited development of rugby will also be examined in this chapter.

Chapter Six examines the re-emergence of the GAA in the county in 1903 inspired by a broad national movement of cultural nationalism. This produced a very different GAA product than that which initially developed in the county. This time the movement had a very definite political agenda, namely the establishment of a distinctive Irish identity, through the medium of playing what were considered to be Irish games and the exclusion of those associated with games identified as West British. The implication of this for other sports, particularly cricket is considered.

Conclusion

This study makes a number of important contributions to the history of sport in Ireland and to Irish historiography in general. It is the first empirically based study to examine the development of sport in an Irish context and as such provides quantitative data to support previously established historical ‘certainties’ on the role and importance of sport or to challenge broadly based generalisations. One of the key features of this study is the data and analysis that it provides on the social backgrounds of those involved in organized club and competitive sport in Victorian Westmeath. Despite the example of several British studies, this type of examination has not been previously attempted for an Irish region.⁶² The study also has wider

⁶² A. Mason, *Association football and English society, 1863-1915*, Brighton, 1980. S Tischler, *Footballers and businessmen: the origins of professional soccer in England*, London & New York, 1981. J. Lowerson, ‘Brothers of the angle: match fishing 1850-1914’ in *Society for the Study of*

implications for sports historiography in that it examines a peripheral area where the population is in continuous decline and is essentially rurally based and depended on agriculture for economic sustenance. British sports historians have produced several important area studies and studies of individual sports but inevitably these examine sport in urban settings that experienced rapid population growth and industrialisation. Neil Tranter's study, for instance examines, developments in central Scotland at a time when the population increased from 122, 000 in 1821 to 233,000 in 1901.⁶³

Despite the dearth of research the emphasis on the importance of the military in the diffusion and popularising of certain sports in Ireland has been a recurring theme.⁶⁴ This study examines the importance of army regiments and individual officers in hunting, golf and especially cricket and soccer and provides the quantitative data to evaluate this importance. The findings of this section have relevance for evaluating the implications of a military posting to Ireland and for an assessment of the role of army personnel in a broader context.

The study is also uniquely inclusive in that it examines the importance of sport to all the groups that form society and ranges from an investigation of the recreational habits of the aristocrats of the county to the agricultural and general labourer. Neither is the study gender constrained. The importance of sport in the lives of women is also examined. The range of sports examined also contributes to its inclusiveness. A study that concentrated on a single sport would have produced a very different picture of the recreational habits of the various social groups and the ensuing social networks.

In its entirety the thesis makes a major contribution to the history of sport and social interaction in Ireland and demonstrates how, in the context of Westmeath, sport developed as a major focus for people's lives.

Labour History, 50, 1985. Tranter, 'Social and occupational structure'. M. A. Speak, 'Social stratification and participation in sport in Mid-Victorian England with particular reference to Lancaster 1840-1870', in Mangan, J.A. (ed.), *Pleasure profit and proselytism*, London, 1988, 42-66.

⁶³ Tranter, 'Social and occupational structure', 305.

⁶⁴ Alan Bairner, 'Ireland, Sport and Empire' in K. Jeffrey (ed.), *An Irish Empire? Aspects of Ireland and the British Empire*, Manchester, 1996, 61. D. Hannigan, *The garrison game: the state of Irish football*, Edinburgh, 1998. Trevor West, *The Bold Collegians*, 13, Dublin, 1991.

Chapter 1: The Community of the Hunt, 1850-1905

Introduction

Horses in post-Famine Ireland differed greatly in purpose, power and value and were central to the economy, local transport and, for a particular class of society, to recreation for much of the period of this study. The opening two chapters of this study examine the role of the horse for recreational purposes, initially by the landed gentry and, as the century progressed, by the more prosperous, adventurous and status conscious members of the Westmeath farming community.

The horse was more important for recreational purposes in Westmeath than in most counties. The annual agricultural statistical returns allow for some quantitative and comparative evaluation of this aspect of horse ownership in each county. In 1901, the population of recreational horses in Westmeath was only exceeded in eight counties.¹ However when their number is expressed as a percentage of the total number of horses in each county then only in Meath, Kildare and Dublin were recreational horses proportionately more numerous than in Westmeath, as can be seen in Appendix 1. This situation whereby 8.22 per cent or almost one out of every twelve horses maintained in Westmeath was for recreational purposes in 1901 represented an improvement on the situation in previous decades as in 1871, 7.4 per cent of horses were maintained for recreation and amusement; in 1881, 6.46 per cent and in 1891, 6.77 per cent.² This importance was partly a product of the land ownership structure of the county and of the number of individuals resident in the county who possessed substantial land portfolios. There were 47 units of land of over 500 acres in the county in 1901 but 78 individuals resided in the county who owned over 500 acres of land in total.³

Hunting provided the most important outlet for horses maintained for recreation and amusement and was central to the lifestyle of a section of the Westmeath gentry. The centrality of hunting to gentry lifestyle has been well established in newspapers,

¹ *Agricultural statistics of Ireland, 1902, 14-16.* The eight counties were Dublin, Kildare, Meath, Cork, Limerick, Tipperary, Antrim and Down.

² *Agricultural statistics of Ireland, 1871, p.lxvi; Agricultural statistics of Ireland, 1882, 14; Agricultural statistics of Ireland, 1891, 62.*

³ *Agricultural statistics of Ireland, 1902, 20.*

memoirs and contemporary articles. Sir John Power, claimed that the Kilkenny gentry were saved from careers as murderers, adulterers and thieves when he introduced them to the sport. J. P. Mahaffey claimed that not to hunt was 'the certain sign of a fool or an ass'. In Meath, according to Lady Fingall, summer was spent waiting for winter and 'if you didn't hunt you might as well be dead'. Sam Reynell believed that a county without foxhounds wasn't fit to live in.⁴ Westmeath devotees promoted hunting's practical value. At the supper given in honour of retired Westmeath master G.A. Boyd, in April 1858, he informed the guests that 'a man never betook himself to matters of business half so efficiently as after half an hour's burst with hounds the preceding day'.⁵

The purpose of this chapter is to carry out an in-depth examination of hunting using the membership and management of the Westmeath Hunt Club as the primary focus of examination. This club provided the structure around which most of the hunting activity of the Westmeath landed gentry was organised during the second half of the nineteenth century. Despite its significance to elite culture, hunting as a recreational activity has received minimal academic consideration. It has been studied in its political context as 'a neglected aspect of the land war' by L.P. Curtis and as part of a local study on the land league in Queen's county by Carter.⁶ The focus of this chapter will be on the sporting and social nature of the activity. A detailed profile of the membership of the Westmeath Hunt club will be constructed for three dates, 1854, 1875 and 1900 as a means of measuring the elite nature of the hunting community and of measuring change and continuity in the activity. The management of the sport will be analysed and in particular the role played by the Master of the Foxhounds (MFH) will be considered. The finances of the Westmeath Hunt Club will be examined. It will be shown that hunting shared financial struggles with other contemporary sporting activities and that elite patronage was as important to the club's survival and individual devotees participation as it was to the less exclusive sporting activities. This chapter is concerned with elite sporting culture and the final section will examine the development of polo in the county. It will be shown that polo developed in the 1880s as an alternative and more structured sporting and social activity to cricket and

⁴ J.P. Mahaffey, 'The Irish Landlords' in *Contemporary Review*, xli, 1882, 162; Elizabeth, Countess of Fingall, *Seventy Years Young*, Dublin, 1991, 98.

⁵ *WG*, 22 April 1858.

⁶ Curtis, 'Stopping the Hunt'. see also Carter, *The Land War*, 223-232.

one that allowed affluent members of the local landed gentry continue their equestrian pursuits over the summer months in a managed and competitive environment.

Hunting in Westmeath dated from the end of the seventeenth century when Bishop Dopping of Meath maintained a private pack at Killucan.⁷ Access to hunting for the next century and a half in the county was by means of invitation from wealthy individuals who maintained private packs.⁸ The organisation of the sport in Westmeath changed fundamentally in 1854 when Sir Richard Levinge recruited a 'huntsman and thirty-five couple of Fox-hounds selected from the best blood of England'.⁹ Within a few weeks forty-two individuals subscribed £600 to maintain the pack and the first subscription pack in the county had been established.¹⁰ The practice whereby those who hunted regularly supported the master by paying him an agreed sum and contributed to the hunting expenses was the most fundamental change that took place in the history of foxhunting. In England, by the 1860s the subscription pack was the norm; their numbers had increased from twenty-four in 1810 to 100 by 1854.¹¹ In Westmeath, the establishment of a subscription pack represented the response of an elite community to the changed post-Famine economic circumstances.¹² The newly established pack hunted for the first time on 1 November 1854 at Ballynagall, the then seat of J.W. Middleton Berry, and on 4 November at Rosmead, on the estate of Lord Vaux of Harrowden.¹³

Hunting embraced two disparate equestrian skills: the ability to hunt and the ability to ride horses and ideally these skills complemented each other in the field. The emphasis was on the chase and hunting memoirs abound with accounts of lengthy chases conducted across hunting country. Hunting notes in the local newspapers and Dease's history of the Westmeath hunt documents several of these spectacular chases. On 22 February 1878 one run through north Westmeath hunting country covered an

⁷ Muriel Bowen, *Irish hunting*, Tralee, 1954, 154.

⁸ In the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century families such as the Pakenhams, various branches of the Fetherstonhaugh family, the Tuites and Murray family possessed private packs amongst others.

⁹ *WG*, 4 May 1854.

¹⁰ *WG*, 18 May 1854.

¹¹ Carr, R, *English fox hunting*, London, 1976, 114-5.

¹² The establishment of a subscription pack did not end the era of the privately supported pack within the county. At different stages during the half-century, despite the difficulties and expense involved, some individuals possessed the necessary resources to maintain a variety of private packs.

¹³ *WI*, 11 Nov. 1854.

estimated eighteen miles and ranged from Pakenham Hall to Drumcree.¹⁴ Another 'red letter day in the annals of hunting' was Friday, 3 December 1880 when a 'glorious run of two hours and five minutes' took place in south Westmeath country centred on Moate and covered a distance that could not 'be less than eighteen miles'.¹⁵

Frequency of participation

This section seeks to establish the frequency with which individuals participated in the sport, examines the frequency that the Westmeath Hunt Club engaged in hunting and attempts to establish the size and social structure of the hunting field. The frequency with which a pack hunted was governed by the size of the hunting country, the supply of foxes, the number of coverts in the district, the size of the subscription received by the master and the willingness of the members to pay for their hunting pleasures. Frequent hunting required a more elaborate hunt club infrastructure and this necessitated larger subscriptions to the master or a willingness on his part to invest his own personal resources. Initially, the Westmeath pack hunted two days a week, but during the master-ship of John Fetherstonhaugh Briscoe (1858-60) hunting was increased to five days a fortnight, which he worked with ten horses.¹⁶ Towards the end of the master-ship of Gerard Dease (1861-68) hunting was extended to three days a week.¹⁷ The 1866-7 season saw seventy-three days hunting with twenty-three foxes killed and only two blank days.¹⁸ A quarter of a century later, in the 1890-91 season, sixty-six days of sport were enjoyed in a season that began on 3 November, with hunting stopped on ten days because of frost, during which thirty-three brace of foxes were killed and forty-five ran to ground.¹⁹ In the 1895-6 season hunting was extended to the maximum the environment was capable of sustaining, when hunting four times weekly began. This required an additional subscription of £100 to the Pakenham brothers who shared joint master-ship. The season saw the hounds out for 105 days and that included thirty days at the cubs.²⁰

¹⁴ WG, 28 Feb. 1878.

¹⁵ WG, 10 Dec. 1880.

¹⁶ Bowen, *Irish hunting*, 195. B.J Fitzpatrick, *Irish sport and sportsmen*, Dublin, 1878, 160.

¹⁷ Edmund F. Dease, *A complete history of the Westmeath hunt from its foundation*, Dublin, 1898, 44.

¹⁸ Ibid. 44.

¹⁹ WG, 24 April 1891.

²⁰ Dease, *Westmeath hunt*, 134.

The actual number who hunted on a particular day in the county is impossible to quantify. Contemporary newspapers published lists of names but made no reference to the numbers in the field. Account material contains no information on the amount of cap money collected either on a daily or seasonal basis. Fitzpatrick, who was familiar with the Irish hunting scene, suggested in 1878, that the average size of a Westmeath hunting field was thirty.²¹ Newspaper reports of numbers present in the field vary over the period and are not comprehensive. The numbers reported hunting during the second week of February 1897 support Fitzpatrick's estimate. The three meets attracted an average attendance of thirty-five.²² Special occasions, such as the possibility of a celebrity joining the field or the opening meet of the season, attracted larger numbers. The numbers hunting in early November 1878 were increased by the presence of Lord Randolph Churchill and the Ladies Churchill in the field.²³ In February 1880, 'there could not be less than 300 horsemen of all grades and classes' present, attracted by the rumour that the Empress of Austria would be hunting.²⁴ In November 1886, seventy-four took part in the opening meet of the season.²⁵ The meeting place was an important factor in determining the number forming the field on any particular day. Venues that were served by the rail network were particularly attractive. It was estimated that the Westmeath hunt attracted up to 150 participants when hunting near Moate in February 1898.²⁶ At least eighty-seven turned out for the Mullingar meet of 8 February 1904.²⁷

In the course of the season individual devotees seemed to have hunted as often as possible. Evidence from hunting diaries, attest to individual obsession with the sport.²⁸ Analysis of the hunting diary of Mr J. M. Moore, a farmer and resident of Rathganny House, Multyfarnham, illustrate his passion for the sport and leisured

²¹ Fitzpatrick, *Irish sport*, 166.

²² *WE*, 20 Feb. 1897.

²³ *WG*, 8 Nov. 1878. Those who joined the field at the Killare crossroads were rewarded with a chase that lasted 'fully an hour and a half' at which Lord and the Ladies Churchill were present at the finish.

²⁴ *WG*, 27 Feb. 1880. The Empress failed to appear.

²⁵ *WG*, 5 Nov. 1886.

²⁶ *WI*, 26 Feb. 1898.

²⁷ *WE*, 13 Feb. 1904.

²⁸ For a Kerry perspective see Valentine M. Bary, 'The hunting diaries (1873-1881) of Sir John Fermor Godfrey of Kilcoleman Abbey, County Kerry', in *Irish Ancestor*, xi, 1979, 107-19, and xii, 1980, 13-25. The county Kerry proprietor of a private pack, Sir John, hunted during the 1863-4 season, which stretched from October to April, on sixty-three occasions. In this season, January was his most active month when he hunted on fourteen occasions with an incredible seven different packs. Ten years later in a rain interrupted season Sir John managed only forty-five outings.

lifestyle.²⁹ In 1879, Moore began his hunting season on 22 September when cub hunting with the Westmeath pack. He went cubbing on five other occasions in October before the hunting season proper began in November. In that month, he hunted on ten occasions, on seven occasions in December, ten in January and March, and twelve occasions in February. The Westmeath pack concluded their season in early April with two meets attended by Moore and with his hunting appetite still unsatiated he joined the Multyfarnham Harriers on one occasion and on three occasions travelled to the western edge of the county to Glasson for a drag hunt. In total, Moore hunted on 59 occasions between September and April during a season in which nine hunting days were lost due to frost.³⁰ Only on six occasions did Moore not take part in the hunt during the season. In the period between August and January 1879-80 he also went shooting on twenty-seven occasions.³¹ Moore was less active the following season. In the period between 21 October and 25 March, he chose not to hunt on eight occasions, but was less fortunate with the weather with fourteen hunting days lost due to frost. Nevertheless he still managed to hunt with the Westmeath pack on fifty occasions.³² The evidence is quite clear. Those who were devotees of the hunt participated on every occasion possible.

Not only did individuals hunt as often as possible they also travelled outside their own hunting country regularly to experience the sport with other packs. Membership of more than one subscription pack was not unusual. Valentine McDonnell was so enamoured by the sport that he rode regularly with five hunt clubs, the Roscommon Staghounds, Roscommon Harriers, the Athlone and District Harriers, the Rockingham Harriers and the Westmeath Hunt Club and acted as a committee member on two of them.³³ The *British Hunts and Huntsmen* is a useful survey of individual hunting habits and documents the multi-dimensional nature of the participation by Westmeath huntsmen and women in the early 1900s. A few examples illustrate the point. Edmund Dease followed the hounds with the Meath, Kildare, Louth, the U.H.C. in Cork, Old

²⁹ V.O District of Mullingar, electoral division of Multyfarnham, 1860-1940, valuation lists No. 37, revision 1, 1897-1907, Moore farmed 162 acres of land valued highly at £129, 17s. at Rathganny with buildings valued at £20, 13s. 35.

³⁰ WCL, Hunting register for the season, 1879-80.

³¹ WCL, The Sportsman's Game Book, 1879-88.

³² WCL, Hunting register for the season, 1880-81.

³³ N.A. Valentine McDonnell Papers; The fox-hunting diary, 1901-02, Business records Roscommon 11/3. See also Jones, *Graziers*, 149.

Muskerry, Duhallow and occasionally the Ward Union Staghounds in Ireland and the Worcestershire, Cheshire, Cottesmore and the Old Berkshire in England.³⁴ Theobald Fetherstonhaugh hunted with the King's County, Kildare, East Galway and the Blazers.³⁵ Familial contacts, an English public school education and a British based military career facilitated this aspect of an individual's hunting career. Members of the hunting community belonged to what David Cannadine has termed 'a truly supra-national class' that 'embraced the whole of the British Isles with its patrician tentacles'.³⁶ This characteristic found expression in their hunting habits.

Hunting and the military

The socio-economic structure of a Westmeath hunting field remained consistent during the course of the second half of the nineteenth century. The typical field was dominated by members of the local aristocracy and gentry, supplemented by officers from the Mullingar and Athlone based military barracks and a number of women devotees of the sport.³⁷

Nineteenth century British army officers were primarily from landed families and it followed that the values and pastimes of that class dominated the British officer corps. The passion for field sports was one of the characteristics that dominated the life of the British officer.³⁸ Campbell considers that team sports and field sports transcended recreational importance for Army officers. 'They were professionally important as well'. The social aspect associated with field sports and games had an important bearing on a man's career prospects. These events were gathering places for upper-class society, and as members of that society the opportunities for officers to mingle and establish networks of influential contacts were crucial. An officer's place in

³⁴ *British Hunts and Huntsmen*, London, 1911, 411.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 411-412. His brother was even more active and as well as participating with the same Irish hunts he also saw action with the Warwickshire, the North Warwickshire, the Atherstone and the Pytchley hunts.

³⁶ David Carradine, *The decline and fall of the British aristocracy*, New Haven and London, 1990, 15.

³⁷ It is impossible to quantify with total accuracy the structure of a hunting field, whilst newspaper accounts of hunting activity are abundant only the well known members of hunting society are identified in the accounts, and lists of participants inevitably conclude with 'etc' abbreviation creating the impression that the account is somewhat incomplete.

³⁸ J. D. Campbell, 'Training for sport is training for war': sport and the transformation of the British Army, 1860-1914 in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 17, 4, 2000, 23.

society, his relationship to senior officers, his connections, relatives and friends, all influenced promotion prospects and duty assignments.³⁹

In the time between completing their formal education and inheriting the family estate many heirs to Irish estates pursued a military career. At officer level Ireland was over-represented in the army as a whole with Irish officers forming about 17.5 per cent of the officer class throughout the nineteenth century.⁴⁰ Hunting thus enabled Westmeath posted army officers to fraternise with many men who had experience of a similar *milieu*. The Westmeath gentry included many men who had engaged in army service and retained their military titles or were men with militia rank. The list of subscribers for the 1895-6 season for instance included twenty-eight (27 per cent) members of Westmeath families who held military titles and included a lieutenant-colonel, four colonels, twelve majors and eleven captains.⁴¹ Thirty-seven of the 114 subscribers in 1900 were current or retired army officers from Westmeath landed families.⁴²

Hunting was central to the lifestyle of many members of the Mullingar based military regiments. It offered a seamless introduction and means of integration into local elite society and an opportunity to sample the other sporting and social opportunities of the district. On 5 March 1867, the officers of the 28th Regiment based in Mullingar, hosted a lavish breakfast meet in the barrack square. Up to 70 male members participated in breakfast that included ‘not only the substantials of a hunt repast, but also all the delicacies of the season’. During the repast the regimental band performed ‘a variety of popular airs’. Ladies inhabited a large number of carriages drawn up in the square and viewed the events from the periphery.⁴³ The opening meet of 1877 included Adjutant Maunsell and officers of the 103rd Royal Bombay Fusiliers and Officers from Athlone and Longford.⁴⁴ In the period while they were based in Mullingar, Colonel Burnett and the officers of the Royal Irish Rifles hunted regularly and the Mullingar military barracks was one of the meeting places for the hunt where

³⁹ Campbell, ‘Sport and the army’, 23-4.

⁴⁰ K Jeffrey ‘Irish military tradition’, 105-6.

⁴¹ Dease, *Westmeath hunt*, 133-4.

⁴² Westmeath Hunt Club Financial Records from 1890-1 to 1900-01 (hereafter WHCFR). Dooley, *Big house*, 58 A list of 112 subscribers to the Limerick Hunt in 1879 included only six army officers.

⁴³ *WG*, 7 March 1867.

⁴⁴ *WG*. 1 Nov. 1877.

‘lavish hospitality’ was dispensed before the hunters departed.⁴⁵ They showed their appreciation of the skills of the Westmeath huntsman Will Matthews, by presenting him with ‘a hunting crop massively mounted in solid silver’ in recognition of the efficiency and skill he displayed during their time in Mullingar.⁴⁶ This regiment enjoyed a particularly close relationship with the local hunting community and Colonel Burnett and his officers were guests at the revived hunt ball of 1889.⁴⁷ Initially, army officers were non-subscribing members of the hunt but as the century progressed regimental subscriptions are recorded in the financial records of the Westmeath Club, as are subscriptions by individual officers. In the period between 1890-1901 officers from the East Lancashire Regiment, the King’s Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, the North Lancashire Regiment and the Inniskilling Dragoons are featured as group subscribers.⁴⁸

In his autobiography, Lieutenant Alexander Godley of the 1st Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers documented the popularity of the Mullingar district to army personnel and the networks with influential families hunting facilitated. He found Mullingar, ‘a paradise for a young and impecunious subaltern’ in the 1880s. Lord Greville and his family, the Smyths of Gaybrook, the Tottenhams of Tudenham, the Levingses of Knockdrin and many other families provided ‘unbounded hospitality’. Non-hunting days were spent on shooting expeditions. After morning parade, ‘a jaunting car, with a professional poacher in attendance was invariably to be found waiting in the barrack square’, who would transport the officers to a ‘likely looking bog’ where shooting for snipe, partridge, duck, hare and pheasant would take place until nightfall. Godley’s ‘delightful life’ was interrupted by orders to transfer to Sligo.⁴⁹ An entry in the journal of the East Lancashire Regiment in August 1890 is equally positive on the attractions of a Mullingar posting and offers an insight into the preoccupations of the officers. Mullingar’s amusements were ‘an incessant round of tennis parties, polo, fishing, and

⁴⁵ WG, 9 March 1888.

⁴⁶ WG, 24 May 1896.

⁴⁷ Minutes of Westmeath Hunt Club (Hereafter MWHC), 31 Jan. 1889.

⁴⁸ WHCFR.

⁴⁹ General Sir Alexander Godley, *Life of an Irish soldier*, London, 1939, 14-16. Godley was a member of a Killegar, county Leitrim family.

later on excellent shooting and hunting. The polo ground is a very good one, and very prettily situated...⁵⁰

AN
AMATEUR
Dramatic Performance
IN AID OF THE
SUBSIDIARY FUNDS OF THE WESTMEATH HUNT
WILL TAKE PLACE IN THE
Gymnasium, Mullingar Barracks
(By kind permission of the Officer commanding).
On **FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 5th**, at 8 p.m.
(Doors open at 7.30 p.m.).
And on **Saturday, February 6th**, at 3.30 p.m.
(Doors open at 3 p.m.)

STEERING COYNE'S amusing Comedy in 3 Acts, entitled—
EVERYBODY'S FRIEND.
Act I.—Mr. Featherly's House at Clapham.
Act II.—Mrs Swandown's House at Maida Hill.
(Three days are supposed to have elapsed since the Second Act).
Act III.—Ante Room in Mr. Featherly's House.

CHARACTERS by The Honble. VERONIQUE GREVILLE, Mrs MAYNE, Mrs
R. W. JEVINGE, Mrs DALLAS, Captain P. H. O'HARA,
Hon. C. FULKE GREVILLE, Capt. C. G. MORRISON, &c.

The splendid String Band of the 2nd Batt. East Lancashire Regiment (by
kind permission of Col. Goodwyn) will perform a Selection of Music on
each occasion.

Source: *Westmeath Guardian* 29 January 1892.

Figure 2: The Mullingar Army Barracks as a venue for Westmeath Hunt Club entertainment.

Apart from direct participation in the hunt and financial support, members of the military establishment provided additional support to the hunt club that promoted the integration of the two communities. The Mullingar army barracks was made available as a venue for social and fund raising events promoted by the hunt club and personnel were provided to participate in dramatic shows (Figure 2). In May 1875, a literary and musical soiree in aid of the fowl fund was held at the Lecture Hall, Mullingar.

⁵⁰ *The Lilywhites' Gazette*, 1 Aug. 1890, viii, 8. I am indebted to Neal Garnham for drawing my attention to this reference.

Colonel Addington made available the band and the Ethiopian serenade troupe of the 100th Regiment for the holding of this event.⁵¹ In January 1893, a theatrical performance was held in the gymnasium in aid of the subsidiary funds of the Westmeath hunt at which the officers and men of the East Lancashire Regiment were assembled in great numbers as both dramatic players and spectators.⁵² Profits from the theatricals organised by the officers of the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment provided £11 to the funds of the hunt committee in the 1893-4 season.⁵³ The Yorkshire Light Infantry officers provided the prizes for the farmers' races of 1897.⁵⁴ On such occasions and at the annual hunt club steeplechases and point-to-point race meets, the presence of the military band was an integral part of the occasion. In 1889, after a lapse of some years the Westmeath hunt ball was revived and was attended by 180 guests at the Gymnasium of the Military Barracks. The venue was used throughout the 1890s for the glittering social highlight of the year that was the hunt ball.⁵⁵

Hunting and women

Women from a landed background, normally accompanied by a male family member, hunted in Westmeath almost from the time of the foundation of the subscription pack. Newspaper accounts regularly mention female participants from the 1860s. In March 1864, at a dinner given in honour of the master, Captain Dease, it was claimed that fifteen women had hunted at Clonyn the previous week.⁵⁶ Ten women joined the field for the initial meet in 1879.⁵⁷ Female hunting became more popular in the 1880s and at this time, it could claim the seal of royal approval, when the Empress Elizabeth of Austria rented Summerhill house in county Meath in 1879 and 1880 and hunted regularly with the Meath, Kildare and Ward Union packs.⁵⁸ In 1886, twenty-seven women were present at Clonhugh for the opening meet of the season.⁵⁹ It is clear that there was a solid if small core of female hunting followers active in the county. The eight married and four single ladies who subscribed to the ladies' damage fund for the

⁵¹ *WG*, 13 May 1875.

⁵² *WG*, 13 Jan. 1893.

⁵³ WHCFR.

⁵⁴ WHCFR, minute of 21 Jan. 1897.

⁵⁵ *WG*, 8 March 1889. Tom Hunt, 'Mullingar Sport in the 1890s: communities at play', in Farrell (ed.), *Mullingar*, 5.

⁵⁶ *WG*, 31 March 1864.

⁵⁷ *WG*, 7 Nov. 1879

⁵⁸ Mark Bence-Jones, *Twilight of the Ascendancy*, London, 1987, 1.

⁵⁹ *WG*, 5 Nov. 1886.

1894-95 season were the central element of this group.⁶⁰ In the concluding year of this study, for the 1905-6 hunting season women formed approximately one third of the hunting field.⁶¹ A photographic collage of the 1906 members of the Westmeath Hunt Club featured thirty-seven female members out of a total of 102.⁶²

Unlike Lady Fingall who has written of the fear and trepidation that she experienced whilst hunting, many Westmeath women were full and active participants in the hunting field.⁶³ Godley in his memoirs identifies Miss Dolly O'Hara and Mrs Jem Locke as women who were 'particularly hard to beat'.⁶⁴ The *British Hunt and Huntsman* considered that there were few finer riders to hounds in the Westmeath country than Mrs Locke and her daughters Mrs Batten and Miss Flo Locke all of whom had hunted since childhood.⁶⁵ A swift gallop across rough country intersected by railway lines, fences topped with wire, ditches and streams was a dangerous and exciting activity and demanded far more sterling qualities than the kindness, courtesy and politeness associated with the stereotypical Victorian female.⁶⁶ Stamina, strength, skill and courage were essential in the high-speed chases that were the one of the key features of the sport. Westmeath hunting accounts identify several women who were present at the kill or at the conclusion of a chase, one of the real indicators of merit for the hunting community. At a meet in February 1873, the MFH was accompanied by his wife, described as one of the most accomplished and pluckiest riders in the world.⁶⁷ On the day, Mrs Greville Nugent gracefully rode over the largest fences 'without effort, at which many a good man and horse came to grief in the vain attempt to follow'. In a two and a quarter hour chase in November 1882, described as 'as good a run as any man ever saw with foxhounds' Mrs Magill rode the run all through in an 'A1' manner and would have got the brush 'had the brave little owner surrendered

⁶⁰ WHCFR. They included the Misses Hall, Quinn, Reynell and Greville as well as Mrs Dease, Mrs J. Fetherstonhaugh, Mrs Greville, Mrs Lewis, Mrs Malone, Mrs Smyth, Mrs Barnes, and Mrs C. Fetherstonhaugh.

⁶¹ *WG*, 26 Jan. 1906; 9 Feb. 1906, 23 Feb. 1906, 2 March 1906; On these occasions 25 women out of field of 73, 39 out of 91, 20 out of 65, 50 out of 120 respectively hunted.

⁶² A copy of this collage is available at the local history room at the Westmeath County Library headquarters in Mullingar.

⁶³ Dease, *Wesemeath hunt*, 131-2.

⁶⁴ Godley, *Irish soldier*, 14.

⁶⁵ *British Hunts and Huntsmen*, 415.

⁶⁶ The dangerous nature of hunting is evident from the fact that five individuals were killed in the Westmeath hunting fields in the period covered by this study.

⁶⁷ *WI*, 1 March 1873.

it'.⁶⁸ At the opening meet in 1886, Miss Hall was presented with the brush.⁶⁹ A 'clipping' run in 1887 ended with Mrs Magill one of only five of the hunting party present at the finish.⁷⁰ However at a meeting of 11 January 1888 the reporter warned that the 'Westmeath ladies must look out or their reputation as fearless Dianas will be lessened', for at this outing the honour of being the first lady up was given to a lady who came from a neighbouring county.⁷¹ In a famous run by the South Westmeath Hounds, the stag was chased for an estimated sixteen miles and amongst those up at the finish were Miss Murtagh and Mrs and Miss Ffrench.⁷² In February 1898, it was the preserve of the married ladies Mrs Malone, Mrs Jackson and Mrs Rowland Hudson to accompany Miss Hall at the final event.⁷³ Miss Hall in particular had become fully immersed in the traditional male world of the hunt and her prowess was eulogised by the Earl of Longford as a lady who was 'so judicious at a double, so audacious at a wall'.⁷⁴ The Reynell sisters were also frequently recognised for their ability in the field and were also distinguished by the length of their hunting careers. Evidence from the personal diary of Laeda Reynell establish her presence in the hunting fields in 1862 and at least one of the Reynell sisters was still hunting in February 1906.⁷⁵

The socio-economic structure of a typical Westmeath hunting field remained consistent during the period of this study. The published attendance at the opening meet of the 1905 season, 'one of the largest ever seen' is indicative of this consistency. The resident landed gentry and their wives or daughters monopolised the field.⁷⁶ Professional representation was confined to three solicitors, two veterinary surgeons, three doctors, a bank manager, and important civil servants such as the county surveyor and the resident magistrate.⁷⁷ Also in the field were a few substantial farmers who were accepted as subscribing members of the hunt since 1887.⁷⁸

⁶⁸ *WG*, 24 Nov. 1882.

⁶⁹ *WG*, 5 Nov. 1886. The brush was presented to the first rider present at the kill.

⁷⁰ *WG*, 18 Nov. 1887.

⁷¹ *WG*, 20 Jan. 1888.

⁷² *WG*, 2 Feb. 1894.

⁷³ *WG*, 26 Feb. 1898.

⁷⁴ Dease, *Westmeath hunt*, preface.

⁷⁵ NLI, Reynell Papers: The Diary of Laeda Reynell, 1862, P.C. 601(II). *WG*, 23 Feb. 1906.

⁷⁶ The wives and daughters totalled thirty-three.

⁷⁷ *WE*, 18 Nov. 1905.

⁷⁸ MWHC, minute of 17 Nov. 1887 and 1 Dec. 1887.

Membership of the Hunt Club

The purpose of this section is to construct a profile of the members of the Westmeath Hunt Club by analysing lists of subscribers for three different years during the second half of the nineteenth century. Three databases were created for 1854, 1875 and 1900 where personal details of the subscribers were recorded. Members of social class A dominated the membership of the Westmeath Hunt Club and therefore additional indices were used to establish the elite nature of hunt club membership. The first measure used was to establish the wealth of the group by identifying the amount of land held by the subscribers using the returns of landowners of 1875 as a measurement template. The second method was to establish their importance by examining the extent to which they were the highest-ranking and illustrious group in county society. Thirdly the measure of their power in local society was considered by establishing the roles they held in local administration.

The forty-two founding subscribers named by the *Westmeath Guardian* on 18 May 1854 were a group of men with ages that ranged between twenty-three and sixty years with an average age of thirty-eight.⁷⁹ Males that ranged from eighteen year old Cecil Fetherstonhaugh to seventy-seven year old Henry Murray dominated the 1875 list of 105 subscribers. The 1900 list of 114 ranged from the seventy-three year old Capt. W. M. Smyth of Drumcree to the twenty-year old Arthur Boyd-Rochfort.⁸⁰ The average age and conjugal status of the subscribers for the chosen dates is illustrated in Table 3. Married and early middle-aged individuals dominated hunt club membership.

	Average age	Married %	Single %
1854 (N=25)	37.8	64	36
1875 (N=46)	43	61	39
1900 (N=67)	44.67	77	23

Table 3: Average age and conjugal status of subscribers to Westmeath Hunt Club, 1854, 1875 and 1900. (N= Number of identified subscribers).

Geographically, the 1854 members resided in the eastern half of the county (Figure 3) and in particular they occupied picturesque demesnes near the three main lakes of mid-Westmeath, whereas the whole county was represented in 1875 and 1900 (Figure

⁷⁹ It was possible to identify the year of birth of twenty-five of the subscribers and the exact age average was 37.8 years of age.

⁸⁰ Dease, *Westmeath hunt*, 131-133. WHCFR.

4). The gentry of the western part of the county subscribed to the county pack since the early 1870s and it was a truly representative one in spatial terms. Athlone based John Longworth disposed of his pack of forty couples of hounds and his large stable of horses in mid-season 1870 and his country was taken over by the Westmeath Club. According to the *Westmeath Independent* the decision was inspired by the scarcity of foxes in the district 'which are said to be trapped for the purpose of preservation of pheasants, by several of the gentry in the locality'.⁸¹

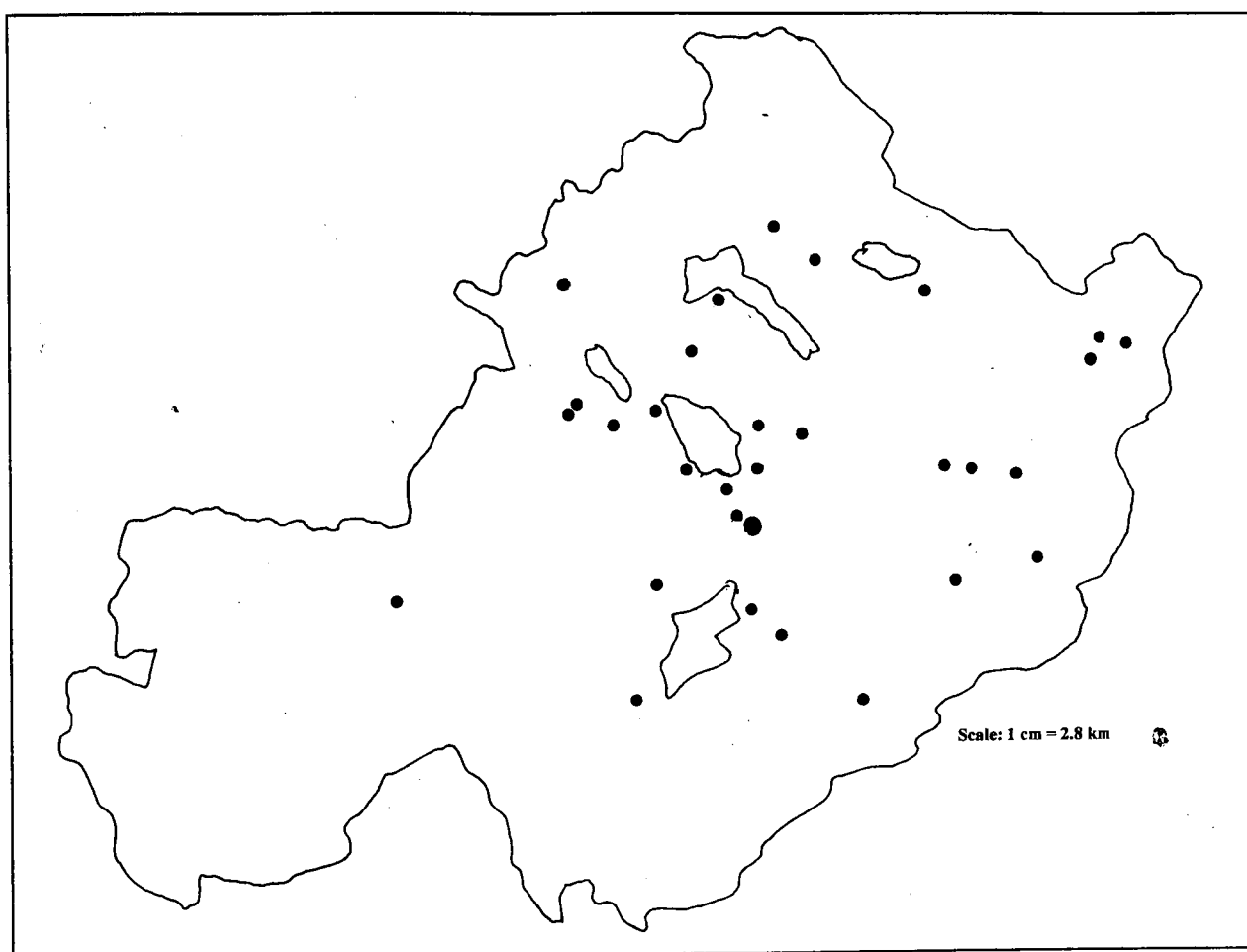


Figure 3: The location of the residences of subscribers to the Westmeath Hunt Club 1854.

Twenty-nine of the forty-one subscribers of 1854 were landowners resident within the county, possessing estates ranging in extent from the 87 acre demesne of Charles Levinge to the 9,783 acre estate of Colonel Greville. Fourteen of the group also owned land outside the county particularly the Honourable Edward King-Harman who in addition to his 1,239 acres of land in Westmeath also possessed a property portfolio of 71,674 acres of land in Longford (28,779 acres), Queen's (1,024),

⁸¹ *WI*, 19 February 1870.

Roscommon (29,242) and Sligo (12,629). This property placed King-Harman in the elite group of 250 territorial magnates who owned land in excess of 30,000 acres in the United Kingdom and who were by definition millionaires assuming their land to be worth thirty-three years purchase.⁸² In Westmeath, nine of the members held land in excess of 5,000 acres and nine held land between 1,000 and 4,999 acres.

The 1875 identified members were the owners of 369,697 acres of land valued at £222,314. Slightly over half of this, 189,348 acres was Westmeath land valued at £127, 392. The members owned 44 per cent of the total land of the county.⁸³ Thirteen subscribers possessed estates larger than 5,000 acres headed by the Earl of Longford with a Westmeath estate of 15,014 acres valued at £9,348. However the most valuable parts of Longford’s assets were located outside Westmeath. His Dublin lands of 420 acres were valued at £31,713 whilst the Longford section of his estate of 4,555 acres was valued at £6,101.⁸⁴ A classification of the identified members in terms of land valuation is illustrated in Table 4.

Valuation	Percentage members
£5,000 and over	25
£2000 to under £5,000	15.3
£1,000 to under £2,000	15.3
£500 to under £1,000	18
Less than £500	26.4

Table 4: Estate valuation of Westmeath Hunt Club members, 1875.

The smaller landed proprietors were in a numerical majority but the real men of substance formed the core of the club. These members of the Pakenham, Nugent, Chapman, Smyth and Fetherstonhaugh families owned between them over 76,000 acres of Westmeath land or 16.74 per cent of the total land of the county. A comparison with a similar profile of the Limerick Hunt Club suggest that the Westmeath Club was a far more elite one and had a much stronger wealth base. T.K.

⁸² Cannadine, *Decline and fall*, 30.
⁸³ This was exactly the same as the amount of land the members of the Queen’s county club owned in that county. The Queen’s county membership also included thirty-three magistrates, twenty-seven grand-jury members and twenty-two freemasons. See Carter, *The Land War*, 224-5.
⁸⁴ *Land owners in Ireland: return of owners of land of one acre and upwards in the several counties, counties of cities, and counties of towns in Ireland*, [C-1492] Dublin, 1876, 82-6.

Hoppen's analysis showed that only 6 per cent of the Limerick Hunt Club members held estates valued in excess of £5,000 whilst those holding estates valued at less than £500 formed 53 per cent of the membership.⁸⁵

All subscribers did not support hunting in equal measures. The financial details of individual subscriptions for 1854 are not available but are for 1862 and are used here to measure individual support for the sport.⁸⁶ In 1862, fifty-four subscribers contributed £682 to maintain the pack. The bulk of this amount was sourced from fifteen members who contributed £385 between them. This meant that 28 per cent of the members subscribed 56 per cent of the total subscribed. These main subscribers were some of the leading land-owning families in the county and included, William Pollard Urquhart, Lord Vaux of Harrowden, the Tuites, the Earl of Granard, Colonel Greville, Sir R. Levinge, Sir P. Nugent and Sir B. Chapman. These gentlemen at the top of the landholding scale were also the ones who helped to finance the sport for the lesser owners. This imbalance was even more important in 1875 when an elite core of twelve members made the heaviest financial contribution and subscribed £350 or 30 per cent of the total. An additional ten members subscribed £20 each so that 21 per cent of total membership subscribed 47 per cent of the total amount contributed. The 26 per cent of the members who held land valued less than £500 subscribed £141 or just 12 per cent of the total. In 1900, eleven members subscribed 38 per cent of the total with thirty-four members contributing 63 per cent of the £983 subscribed. Patronage was a crucial factor in the development of Victorian sport and it was as important to the survival of hunting as it was to the farm-labourers' cricket.

Much has been written about the importance of hunting to gentry lifestyle but there has been no analysis carried out to establish what proportion of the landed gentry actually participated in and supported the sport. A comparison of the 1875 list of subscribers to the Westmeath hunt with the 1876 return of owners of land for the county illustrates the importance of hunting to the lifestyle of a particular section of the county gentry and major landowners. In 1876 ninety-five estate owners in Westmeath possessed properties of at least 1,000 acres. Thirty-seven of these were non-resident. Another seventy-nine individuals possessed estates between 500 and

⁸⁵ T. K. Hoppen, *Elections, politics and society in Ireland, 1832-1885*, Oxford, 1984, 121.

⁸⁶ Dease, *Westmeath hunt*, 131

999 acres in extent. Fifty-two of these were non resident thus leaving a group of 58 resident owners who possessed estates in excess of 1,000 acres and twenty-seven who held estates of between 500 acres and 1,000 acres. Thirty-five members of the former group (sixty per cent) and seven (twenty-six per cent) of the latter group subscribed to the Westmeath Hunt Club in 1875. The culture of hunting was most important to those who held estates in excess of 1,000 acres and the majority of the members of this group were active supporters. These were the ones who could afford the expense of maintaining a hunting stable and the cost of hunting on a regular basis. For those outside this elite group the sport was very much one with a minority appeal. These may have joined the hunt in their areas as non-subscribers, paid their field money and participated on an irregular basis.

Hunt club members as local administrators

The members of the landed gentry served in the major positions in local government for much of the century, the most senior of which the office of *custos rotulorum* was largely honorific.⁸⁷ The position of Lord Lieutenant was the most powerful one and the holder was supported by a number of deputy-lieutenants.⁸⁸ Grand Juries were the preserve of the landlord class. They were relieved of their administrative functions when the Local Government Act of 1898 was passed but they retained their judicial importance.⁸⁹ Landowners, sons of landowners and land agents acted as magistrates who presided at the quarter sessions and also sat at the local petty sessions trials. The High Sheriff was the principal representative of central government in the county in the execution of the law and was responsible for the execution of legal process in both civil and criminal actions arising from the courts. His responsibilities ranged from selecting the grand jury to the conduct of parliamentary elections. The members of the Westmeath Hunt Club were actively involved in these positions and provide indices of the elite status of the group. The number of Westmeath Hunt Club members who held these positions is illustrated in Table 5.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Virginia Crossman, *Local Government in nineteenth century Ireland*, 1994, Belfast, 15.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 18-19.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 25-41.

⁹⁰ *Thom's Directory*, 1854, 699; *Thom's Directory*, 1875, 1274; *Thom's Directory*, 1900, 1547.

Position	1854 (N=54)	1875 (N=106)	1900 (N=115)
High Sheriff	10	26	11
Magistrate	27	44	53
Deputy-Lieutenant	9	21	16
Grand Jury	21	33	38

Table 5: Number of Westmeath Hunt Club members who held official county administration and legal positions in 1854, 1875 and 1900 (N = total number of subscribers).

The holders of the deputy-lieutenants' positions were particularly immersed in the world of the hunt. There were seventeen deputy-lieutenants in Westmeath in 1854 and nine of these were members of the Hunt Club.⁹¹ Two members of the Dease family held a similar post in county Cavan and Joseph Tuite acted as deputy-lieutenant for Longford. In the later samples practically all holders of the position in the county hunted. In 1875, eighteen individuals held the position and all except one were members of the hunt club while in 1900 fifteen of the eighteen deputy-lieutenants subscribed.⁹²

According to Virginia Crossman membership of the grand jury carried considerable honorific value as the order in which the jurors stood on the list indicated the jurors' social standing.⁹³ Twenty-one of the subscribers to the hunt club were grand jury members in 1854 and using Crossman's thesis as an indicator of social status, fourteen were ranked in the leading forty jurors called.⁹⁴ In 1875, twenty-three of those called were from the leading forty Grand Jury members. Membership of grand juries encouraged conviviality and socialisation and included some of the virtues of club life with grand jury rooms complete with coffee rooms to make things more comfortable. Hoppen believed that magistrates used quarter sessions as much for tribal solidarity as for law enforcement.⁹⁵

⁹¹ *Thom's Directory*, Dublin, 1854, 699.

⁹² *Thom's Directory*, 1875, 1274.

⁹³ Crossman, *Local government*, 27.

⁹⁴ *WG*, 1 March 1855.

⁹⁵ Hoppen, *Elections*, 119.

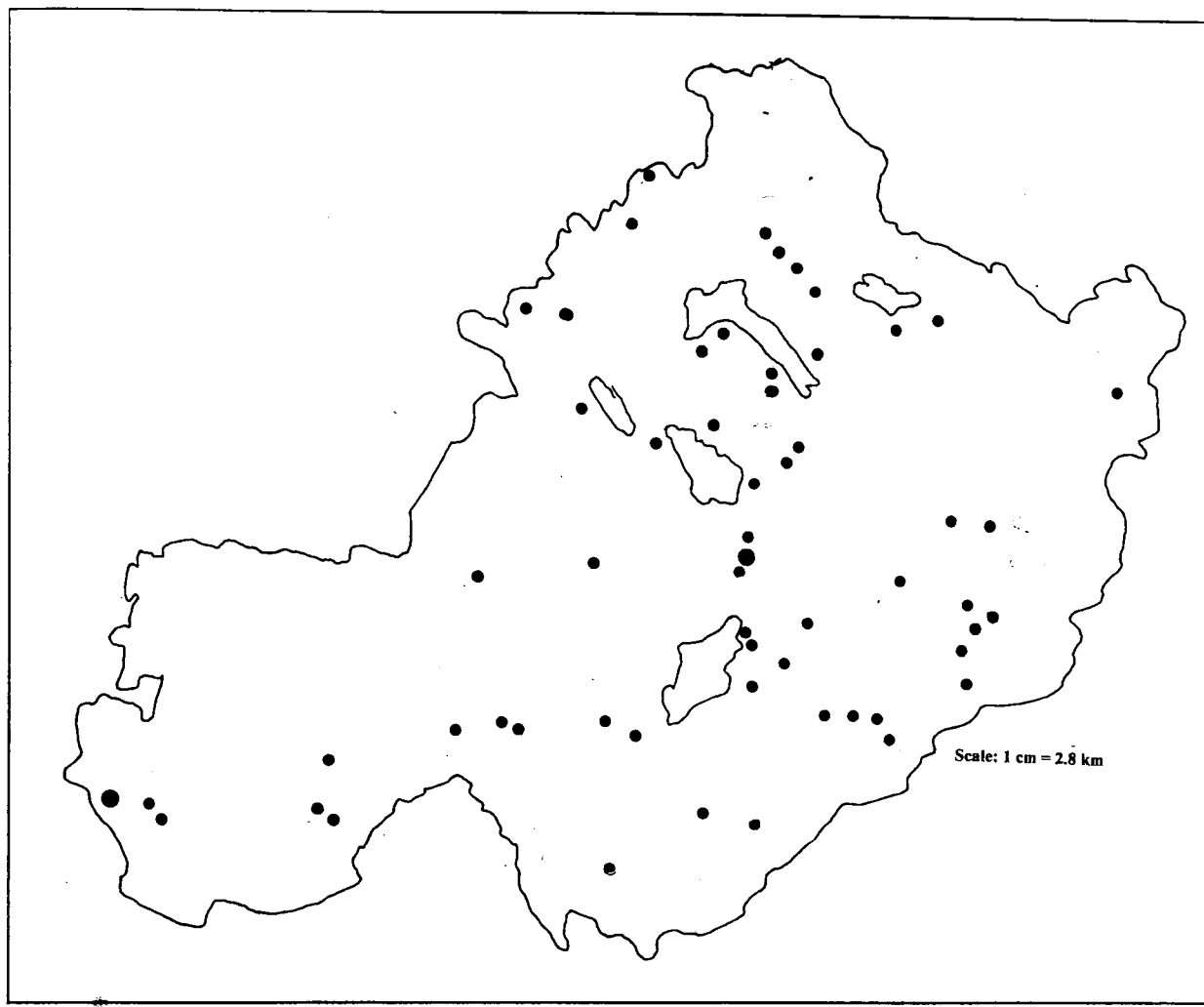


Figure 4: Place of residence of members of Westmeath Hunt Club in 1900.

If as Hoppen suggests, Grand Jury membership was important to the maintenance of tribal solidarity, then hunting, where members assembled as often as four times a week, provided the essential compound of communal identity. The members of the Westmeath Hunt Club used the club as the main vehicle for the maintenance and development of social networks. In Victorian times, Dublin and London social clubs played an important role in aristocratic and gentry lifestyle. Accommodation at reasonable rates, quality food, reading and writing rooms, billiard rooms, card rooms and smoking rooms were provided in all clubs.⁹⁶ The two most important Irish clubs were located in Dublin, the Kildare Street Club on the south side of the river Liffey and the Sackville Street Club located north of the river.⁹⁷ Club membership was a relatively un-important aspect of the lifestyle of the members of the Westmeath Hunt. In 1854, only eight or 19 per cent were members of an Irish club while ten subscribers conducted sufficient business in London to make it worthwhile to join one of the many clubs available. Only eighteen subscribers seem to have joined one of the

⁹⁶ Dooley, *Big house*, 64.

⁹⁷ Bence-Jones, *Twilight*, 53-56.

Dublin clubs and twenty-three subscribed to sixteen different London clubs in 1875.⁹⁸ Three members joined the Junior United Services club which was confined to those who were princes of the blood royal, officers of the navy and army, persons holding appointment in military departments and lords lieutenants of Great Britain and Ireland.⁹⁹ The Earl of Granard, Lt-Col. John James Nugent and Thomas J. Smith were the members of the Westmeath Hunt who reached the exacting standards required for membership of this exclusive club. Those who wished to experience locally based male conviviality, undertake charitable projects, involve themselves in self-improvement exercises and who were unfulfilled by the rituals of the hunting field found an outlet in the local branches of the Freemasons. Athlone, Mullingar and Castlepollard had Freemason branches in the second half of the nineteenth century. A small minority of hunt club members were members of the local branches. In 1875, twelve per cent and in 1900 fourteen per cent were Freemasons.¹⁰⁰

Communal identity of the group was solidified by their shared political belief. The ethos of the group at this time was distinctly unionist with the notable exception of the Liberal Home Ruler, Lord Greville. In April 1893, a major open-air assembly was held in Mullingar 'to protest against the Home Rule Bill and also to show that there were Unionists outside of Ulster'.¹⁰¹ The published list of those in attendance might in different circumstances be listed as the members of the Westmeath Hunt Club such were their dominance of the meeting. Sir Montague Richard Chapman, Master of the Fox Hounds from 1876-1881, chaired the assembly and delivered the introductory address in which as Unionists the 'right to live as citizens as under the rule of the Queen and the glorious Empire which their forefathers helped to build' was established.¹⁰² Three other members of great Westmeath hunting families, the Earl of Longford who would accept the position of MFH before the year ended, Edward Dames-Longworth and Edmund F. Dease, also addressed the meeting. In July 1893, a

⁹⁸ The more up-market Kildare Street club was by far the most popular. Thirteen of the eighteen were members of this club whilst only five joined the Sackville Street club. More subscribers were members of London clubs than Dublin clubs indicative perhaps of the extent to which London as opposed to Dublin life dominated the mental and social world of these members.

⁹⁹ Dooley, *Big house*, 63.

¹⁰⁰ FL., Ledger 1-199, membership of Mullingar lodge number 131; Ledger 95-188, membership of Mullingar lodge, number 131, 289-293; membership of lodge number 123, 'Albert Edward lodge Mullingar, 226; membership of lodge number 124, Castlepollard, 235; membership of lodge number 101, Athlone, 49-53.

¹⁰¹ *WG*, 7 April 1893.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

formal organisation to oppose Home Rule, the Irish Unionist Alliance, was established in the county with an officer board who were all subscribers to the hunt club. The sixteen man committee included thirteen members of the Westmeath Hunt Club.

The group in 1900 was still dominated by members of the aristocracy and the landed gentry. There was very little evidence of the sport becoming democratised or members of the more prosperous middle classes becoming part of the support structure of the still gentrified sport. The subscribers included the manager of the Mullingar Hibernian Bank where the hunt club accounts were located, two doctors and five lawyers. Three of the lawyers combined land agency with their legal work. Two of these, Edward Dease and Theobald Fetherstonhaugh were members of Westmeath hunting and landed families. The county surveyor and the resident magistrate also subscribed. Four females were also listed amongst the subscribers. Three of these were widows with strong family connections to the world of the hunt and the fourth was a divorcee, Mrs Locke. The hunting community as measured by those who subscribed in 1900 was still essentially a closed community, its membership confined almost exclusively to those of an aristocratic and gentry background.

A notable exception to the above generalisation was Mullingar solicitor Eddie Shaw who made the transition from his middle class Catholic background to become fully immersed in the hunting, shooting, fishing and racing world of the landed elite. The Shaw family were proprietors of one of Mullingar's largest wine and spirit stores, operated a large wholesale and retail grocery trade, and were 'midland agents for the products of Messrs Guinness'.¹⁰³ At the end of the century the legal profession was a popular if laborious and expensive choice for aspiring Catholic professionals. Progress in the profession was heavily dependent on contacts within the field.¹⁰⁴ Eddie Shaw qualified as a lawyer in 1892 finishing in seventh place from the thirty-one who completed the final examination and the profession provided him with access to elite social circles that he exploited to become fully integrated in the exclusive

¹⁰³ *WG*, 26 Dec. 1890.

¹⁰⁴ Senia Paseta, *Before the revolution: nationalism, social change and Ireland's Catholic elite, 1879-1922*, Cork, 1999, 83-5.

sporting world of the hunt.¹⁰⁵ His activities embraced all aspects of equestrian sports participating in puppy walking, hunting, racing and polo as a participant and as an administrator.¹⁰⁶ He competed successfully in steeplechasing both as an owner and amateur jockey.¹⁰⁷ He combined these activities with the position of secretary of the hunt races and the point-to-point races and acted as clerk of the scales at the annual polo club races.¹⁰⁸ Shaw however was an exception; there is little evidence of newly established professionals making the transition from their middle-class background to the landed society of the hunting community.

The most significant change in the membership profile of the group since 1875 was the presence of thirteen ‘bona fide’ farmers as subscribers, a number that had declined since the 1895-6 season when eighteen farmers subscribed.¹⁰⁹ These were eligible for membership since December 1887 when a motion proposing ‘that bona fide working farmers be admitted as members of Westmeath hunt, subject to the approval of hunt committee, on payment of a subscription of two guineas’, was accepted.¹¹⁰ This move was instigated by Lord Greville and was made in a spirit of inclusiveness and was in keeping with the liberal principles of the master who was a strong supporter of tenants’ rights and the only peer in the House of Lords to support the 1886 Home Rule Bill.

The Westmeath Hunt Club were the first established hunt club to extend its membership eligibility and the decision had a number of practical implications. Farmers who subscribed had access to a far wider range of steeplechase races and were no longer restricted to participation in farmers’ races at hunt club organised meets or point-to-point races. They were also qualified to compete in National Hunt meets as steeplechase riders. The development of a large Westmeath racing community was partly a product of the hunt club membership facility that Westmeath farmers enjoyed. The decision according to Dease ‘brought about a material change in

¹⁰⁵ *WN*, 24 Nov. 1892.

¹⁰⁶ *WE*, 15 April 1899.

¹⁰⁷ In 1896 he rode the winner of the Westmeath Hunt Club welterweight race on Larkfield, the property of Captain Lewis. Subsequently he rode each year and in 1899 he won the Westmeath lightweight cup on his own horse, Diversion. In 1904 at the Westmeath Hunt races he was the first winner of the Harry Whitworth cup valued at 100 guineas piloting his own horse Little Boy to victory.

¹⁰⁸ *British Hunts and Huntsmen*, 419.

¹⁰⁹ Dease, *Westmeath hunt*, 130.

¹¹⁰ WHCMB, 15 Dec. 1887.

the Hunt as a club' and 'the new rule carried so far that one prominent member of the Hunt gave up his place on the committee, and joined as a two guinea member'.¹¹¹

The term 'bona fide' farmer in practice meant one that was a tenant and earned his living from farming the land as opposed to being a proprietor of a landed estate. These farmed substantial areas of land as revealed by an examination of the information contained in the valuation records and the size and value of their holdings is reproduced Appendix 2. These were the men involved in the commercial sector of Irish agriculture, who managed their holdings as commercial enterprises with the objective of generating a cash surplus. These were the graziers who specialised in the raising of dry cattle and sheep as explained in the introduction. Profits generated by the grazier provided a means of status enhancement that was manifested particularly in a tendency to adopt many of the norms and habits of the gentry. The landlord provided the model of social worth and imitation of the gentry' life-style was a central feature of the societal and familial roles performed by the upwardly mobile rancher.¹¹² Thus, it is suggested that a small group of commercially successful upwardly mobile Westmeath farmers chose participation in the hunting and allied racing field as a means of proclaiming this success.

Thomas Maher who farmed at Moyvoughley in Moate, county Westmeath was typical of this category of farmer. A subscriber in 1875 and 1900 he leased 524 acres from John Ennis and a further 200 acres in nearby Mount Temple. Maher's primary economic activity was cattle fattening. He purchased two-year old store cattle at fairs throughout Ireland fattened them until four year olds at Moyvoughley before they were transferred to Maher's county Meath farm where they were fattened and sold on the Dublin market. An extensive sheep farming and horse breeding enterprise supported the primary cattle grazing enterprise. The Maher mansion became a centre of elite entertainment and was frequently used as a meeting place when south Westmeath was hunted and was also used for private coursing meets. The centrality of hunting to the status and lifestyle of its followers precluded any economic

¹¹¹ Dease, *Westmeath hunt*, 110.

¹¹² Jones, 'Cleavage', 404-5

retrenchment. At Maher's death, in 1903, the estate was valued at £4,243 but his wife Mary inherited debts in excess of £16,000.¹¹³

Professionalising the Hunt

Participants in elite sports invested in professional expertise to manage and enhance their recreational experience. Golf professionals were hired to improve skill levels; grounds-men maintained the golf links and tennis pavilion and professional cricketers combined their maintenance duties with some playing duties. The most important of these individuals was the master of the hounds (MFH) whose responsibilities included the management, patronage and organisation of the hunting business.

The master's role was to manage and organise all activities necessary for the smooth working of the hunt. It was a position that carried considerable responsibility and status. In the community of the landed, few positions, social, economic or political conferred similar status or carried with it more responsibility. The demands were enormous and required that the master carry out an infinite variety of tasks. Itzkowitz has outlined these tasks and the personal qualities necessary to ensure the smooth operating of the hunt in considerable detail.¹¹⁴ He was responsible for providing 'sport' for the most privileged and socially elite group in the county.¹¹⁵ Firstly, he was responsible the day-to-day management of the affairs of the hunt and was in total charge of the field on the day of the hunt. He had to ensure that the kennels housed a good pack of hounds, well fed and trained and ready for any chase that presented itself. The charge of not managing the hounds properly was used by Dease to discredit the era of Reginald Greville. He claimed that the hounds took on the character of their master and 'became decidedly flighty' and that hounds that were not fast enough were left at home and not exercised.¹¹⁶ Key hunt servants, the huntsman, in particular had to be well mounted. In the case of Westmeath, with the exception of the master, many of these key personnel, such as the huntsman and the whippers in, were recruited from England but their wage was the responsibility of the master. The job was a year round

¹¹³ Moyvoughley Historical Committee, *Moyvoughley and its hinterland*, nd, np, 108-13.

¹¹⁴ Itzkowitz, *Peculiar privilege: a social history of English fox hunting, 1753-1885*, London, 1977, 81-97.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, 82.

¹¹⁶ Dease, *Westmeath hunt*, 75-8.

one, as during the closed season the duties of breeding, whelping and buying hounds and selecting horses had to be managed.

The master was responsible for keeping the country well stocked with foxes. This was achieved by ensuring coverts were planted and maintained, farmers had to be convinced to preserve foxes and compensated promptly when animals were destroyed and if necessary, foxes were imported. The mastership of Gerald Dease (1861-1868) illustrates this aspect of the role. In 1863, he visited 'every locality where foxes wanted looking after, and paid herds and gamekeepers on whose beats they were brought out'. He maintained the financial viability of the damage fund. In 1866, he publicly appealed to hunters to subscribe to the fund and offered to contribute an additional £5 for every £20 subscribed.¹¹⁷ In November, he imported twenty-five brace of Scottish foxes and continued this practice throughout his term of office.¹¹⁸ He also invested in covert management and planted two acres of gorse at Glananea and the same amount at Killynon. Culleen's gorse was also rented and enclosed.¹¹⁹ Shooting devotees were persuaded that foxes did not damage game. As was shown earlier, Mr Longworth in south Westmeath disposed of his hounds when local gentry continued to set traps for the foxes they believed destroyed the pheasant population.¹²⁰

As the public face of the sport in his neighbourhood, the master had to personify diplomacy for any animosity towards him could easily become a vendetta against the sport.¹²¹ As a highly visible institution with a strong identity with local personalities and administrators the potential it represented for local protests was immense. This was particularly likely in the Irish situation, especially in the final quarter of the nineteenth century.¹²² The appointment of the Earl of Longford, as the Westmeath MFH, was followed by an attempt by the Mullingar branch of the Irish National

¹¹⁷ *WG*, Feb 5 1866.

¹¹⁸ Dease, *Westmeath hunt*, 36.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* 37.

¹²⁰ Edmund Mahoney, *The Galway blazers*, Galway, 1979, 4. The followers of the Galway blazers almost suffered a similar fate. Burton Perssee who served as master between 1852 and 1885 threatened to resign in 1873 and sell the pack because the hunting country was being denuded of foxes through the widespread use of gin traps for trapping rabbits. The trapping programme was operated by a many of Perssee's fellow hunting men

¹²¹ Itkowitz, *Peculiar privilege*, 80-1.

¹²² Curtis, 'Stopping the hunt'; Carter, *The land war*. The tactic adopted by the Land League of stopping the hunt as a means of political protest, has been dealt with in detail by Curtis in the national context, and by Carter at the local level of the Queen's county.

Federation to politicise the appointment. The Longford family was one of the chief representatives of the Unionist agenda and party chairman Rev. Fr E. O'Reilly attempted to re-introduce hunt stopping to the political agenda. The members, according to the cleric, were not against hunting but were against Lord Longford heading the hunt without a measure of protest. Support for Lord Longford was equated with the undermining of the nationalist cause.¹²³ However, attempts to enlist INF support from other districts attracted little support.¹²⁴ The decision of Lord Castlemaine to resign the master-ship of the south Westmeath hounds in 1898 was regretted by the members not least because the position of Lord Castlemaine accounted for the willingness with which the 'people permitted them more or less to trespass on their holdings'.¹²⁵ Holt's contention that 'there was nothing like riding over a peasant's field for letting him know who was in charge', is untenable as the members of the Westmeath Hunt were to find out on a number of occasions during the last decades of the nineteenth century.¹²⁶

The position of master was one that made considerable demands on the holder but it was attractive as it provided access to social networks at the highest aristocratic level. The MFH topped the invitation list for in-house gentry entertainments and local society occasions and was required to entertain numerous guests himself. According to Harry Worcester Smith, Master of the Westmeath Hunt in 1912 it was 'the charming custom in Ireland when the hunt is in your vicinity to offer the master the hospitality of your house, so as to save him the ride in the morning, a time honoured custom that gave a great deal of pleasure'.¹²⁷ Smith was a native of Worcester, Massachusetts and spent Christmas Eve, 1912 in the Boyd-Rochfort home at Middleton Park, in the company of individuals of similar status and interests. The experience was such that 'one away from his own family could never find a more congenial and jolly household than that of Mr and Mrs Boyd-Rochfort, Major and Henry Bayley, Mr Cecil Rochfort and Atty Perssee with their love of horses, hound, rod and gun'.¹²⁸ When he moved into his own accommodation at Portloman, near

¹²³ *WN*, 7 Dec. 1893.

¹²⁴ *WN*, 21 Dec. 1893.

¹²⁵ *WI*, 26 Feb. 1898.

¹²⁶ Richard Holt, *Sport and the British: a modern history*, Oxford, 1989, 243.

¹²⁷ H.W. Smith, *A sporting tour through England, Wales and France in the years 1912-1913*, Worcester, Mass, 1925, 197.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* 204.

Mullingar no expense was spared to provide lavish entertainment. Gourmet food with a distinctly American flavour was served. ‘Delicious confectionery was imported from New York, Rokeby ham from Virginia and deer-food sausage from Massachussets’. These were included in a menu that also contained ‘chicken a la Maryland, golden plover, Irish Oysters [sic], cigars from Havana and grapefruit from Havana’.¹²⁹ In the hierarchy of positions available in county society the position of MFH ranked close to the top and according to Lord Willoughby de Broke only the position of Lord-Lieutenant was more important or coveted.¹³⁰ The rules of Irish steeplechasing officially recognised this importance. An MFH, a member of the INHSC, or a military officer were empowered to annually nominate the names of gentlemen jockeys prior to balloting by the authorities.¹³¹

As the holder of one of the leading positions in county society masters had to reside in appropriate circumstances and this created an additional expense for non-natives. The first of these, Charles Macdonald Moreton resided in Cullion for some time but later took residence at Carroll’s Hotel in Mullingar while he kept his horses at livery stables. Later he moved to Clondrisse but continued to stable his horses in Mullingar.¹³² Charters used the palatial Annebrook House in Mullingar as his base whilst his successor Harry Whitworth moved from there to Middleton Park at the start of the 1906 season and used the Boyd-Rochfort family residence as his base.¹³³

Abundant personal wealth and a willingness to invest it in large quantities to provide sport for people of similar interests was also a prerequisite for the position. Lord Fingall retired from his first period as MFH of the Fingall Hounds a ‘good deal poorer’ and according to the memoirs of his wife Elizabeth, Countess of Fingall ‘having the hounds twice nearly ruined him’.¹³⁴ After serving two years as MFH of the Queen’s county pack, Robert Stubber, complained that he was £1,000 ‘out of pocket’.¹³⁵ Individuals who accepted a master-ship were making an investment in

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* 213.

¹³⁰ Lord Willoughby de Broke, *The passing years*, London, 1924, 56-8; Cannadine, *Decline and fall*, 356-7; Itzkowitz, *Peculiar privilege*, 84.

¹³¹ *Irish Sportsman*, 23 March 1878.

¹³² Itzkowitz, *Peculiar privilege*, 57-8.

¹³³ *WG*, 2 Nov. 1906.

¹³⁴ Fingall, *Seventy years young*, 186.

¹³⁵ Carter, *The land war*, 223.

social enhancement and in a sense paralleled the decision to opt for an army career. The choice of an army career was 'largely to consolidate social position' as army pay served only to supplement an allowance from a family estate.¹³⁶ A private income was as important a pre-condition to an army career as it was to the master-ship of a pack of hounds. Investment in personal enhancement was a characteristic of those from the social background shared by the MFH.

The turnover of masters distinguished the Westmeath Hunt Club. This characteristic was unusual amongst Irish packs and is an indication of the financial demands made on the holder of the post. Fifteen different individuals held the position, and on four occasions, a committee of three was installed to manage the hunt. Few counties ever had more than temporary difficulty in finding a master and according to Itkowitz 'it seemed that as soon as one man stepped down, there were two more clamouring to take his place'.¹³⁷ The uniqueness of the Westmeath situation is highlighted by comparison with what happened in neighbouring counties. Eight different masters headed the harriers of County Longford in the same period, with recourse to a committee only necessary on one occasion.¹³⁸ Ten different masters controlled the Galway Blazers between 1852 and 1908.¹³⁹ The much larger Kildare Hunt survived with eight masters between 1854-1906.¹⁴⁰ However, between 1886-1900, Westmeath only had two masters. This was the period when the landed gentry faced their strongest economic challenges. The likelihood is that, individuals from two of the leading families in the county, the Greville and Longford families, accepted the position from a sense of obligation to their fellow landlords.

An examination of those who held the position in Westmeath illustrates a number of characteristics shared by the post holders. Those in their late twenties or early thirties normally filled the position. The average age of a Westmeath MFH on appointment was thirty-one years and the age range of those who held the position varied from the forty-five years old Lord Greville to the twenty-three year old Montague Richard

¹³⁶ Dooley, *Big house*, 74.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.* 84.

¹³⁸ Fergus O'Farrell, 'Glimpses of County Longford's hunting and racing past' in Eugene McGee (ed.), *A century of Longford life: Longford Leader, 1897-1997*, Longford, 1997, 175. Four masters controlled the Longford Harriers between 1860-90 with the changed economic circumstances for landowners reflected in the appointment of four different masters and a committee on one occasion in the 1890s.

¹³⁹ Mahony, *Galway blazers*, Galway, 1979, 123.

¹⁴⁰ Earl of Mayo and W.D.Boulton, *A history of the Kildare hunt*, London, mcmxiii, v, 357-9.

Chapman. This age profile was a product of the expense involved, as the position was only a practical proposition for those who had inherited or were about to inherit estates.

Name	Term of office	Age when MFH
Sir Richard Levinge	1854-55	43
George Augustus Boyd	1855-58	29
John Fetherstonhaugh Briscoe	1858-60	28
GAR Boyd, Lord Vaux, JF Briscoe	1860-61	
Capt. Gerald Richard Dease	1861-68	30
Charles Macdonald Moreton	1868-71	Unknown
Capt. J Richard Malone, Samuel Winter & Joseph Tuite		
Capt. Richard Coote	1871-72	
Capt Hon. Reginald Greville Nugent	1872-74	24
Capt. J R Malone, Ambrose More O'Farrell & Richard Reynell jnr	1874-75	
Sir Walter Nugent, Lord Kilmaine (Richard Levinge) & Richard Reynell, jnr.	1875-76	
Mr Montague Richard Chapman	1876-1881	23
E. Purdon, Capt. Thomas L. Dames & Major J. R. Malone	1881-1882	
Capt William H. Macnaghten	1882-83	Unknown
Capt. James Towers-Clarke	1883-86	31
Lord Greville	1886-1893	45
Lord Longford & Hon. Edward Michael Pakenham	1893-1900	29/27
James B. Charters	1900-1903	32
Harry Whitworth	1903-1909	33

Table 6: Holders of position of Master of the Fox Hounds in Westmeath, 1854-1909.

Eight of those who held the position were members of county based aristocratic or landed gentry families of the highest rank.¹⁴¹ These were members of the Levigne, Rochfort-Boyd, Fetherstonhaugh Briscoe, Dease, Greville, Chapman and Pakenham families. Apart from Fetherstonhaugh Briscoe who possessed an estate of only 379 acres, the others possessed estates of at least 2,300 acres and four families owned a minimum 9,000 acres of Westmeath land.¹⁴² Those who provided interim management were drawn from the same class. A second characteristic of those who held the post was the large number who had experience of an army career. This is

¹⁴¹ The Greville family supplied two masters while the Pakenham family (the Earls of Longford) provided joint masters during the 1880s.

¹⁴² *Land owners in Ireland*, 82-7.

partly a reflection of the popularity of an army career with the eldest sons of landed estate proprietors as they awaited inheritance.¹⁴³ This was ideal preparation for master-ship according to Dease ‘for a field of hunting men (including women and children) is very like a troop of cavalry, only more stupid and less obedient’.¹⁴⁴

Non-residents appointed to the position in the county were generally well known to a key-member of the hunting community and had some experience of hunting the country. The first appointed in 1868 was Scottish native Charles MacDonald Moreton who had hunted in Meath for three years prior to taking charge in Westmeath and had been integrated into the social and hunting network of the area through his friendship with the Reynell family, one of the great hunting families in the district.¹⁴⁵ An infrastructural development at this time made it easier for a non-native of the county to accept the post. Permanent kennels were constructed at considerable additional expense to the subscribers.¹⁴⁶ Richard Coote, who had served as a Captain in the Carabiniers and hunted with the Badminton, succeeded MacDonald Moreton. He took control of the hounds on the opening day of the 1871-2 season. His friendship with Joseph Tuite, who provided the master with accommodation in Culleen, was again responsible for his recruitment. Coote was a native of Cootehill, county Cavan and was a stereotypical hard living, heavy gambling member of the gentry. He presided over the Westmeath hunt at a time when his county Cavan estate was in serious financial difficulties. This according to one commentator was the inevitable result of a situation

Where no mental culture has taken place in early youth, the Irish lordling is an imbecile for life; and for want of useful employ betakes himself to the chase and the turf, to gambling and tippling, and all kinds of frivolity and dissipation.¹⁴⁷

Coote served as master for only one season and according to Dease ‘would probably have given satisfaction had he been asked to stay on for another season’.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ Dooley, *Big house*, 73.

¹⁴⁴ Dease, *Westmeath hunt*, 69.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 51.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 42. £320 was subscribed.

¹⁴⁷ Rev. Randall McCollum, *Sketches of the highlands of Cavan*, Belfast, 1856, 252.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*. 67-8.

Reginald Greville, who combined his master-ship duties with a career as a leading gentleman jockey, succeeded Coote. Using the pseudonym ‘St. James’, he was at the time one of the most active and successful jockeys in the country in the 1870s. Greville’s racing record for the period 1871-77, as well as the other leading gentlemen riders of the time is illustrated on Table 7.

Name	1871	1872	1873	1874	1875	1876	1877
‘St. James’	--/--	23/5	55/12	47/22	30/14	70/19	43/15
T. Beasley	29/5	26/1	31/6	48/12	76/25	57/18	52/9
Capt. Bates	--/--	--/--	11/3	13/4	24/8	45/17	31/9
T Widger	9/2	8/0	5/1	2/0	16/2	46/9	56/10
G. Moore	36/9	58/18	68/16	60/17	44/12	29/8	51/16
D. Murphy	3/1	10/1	12/3	18/4	29/8	30/6	6/2

Source: *The Irish Sportsman*, 24 November 1877.

Table 7: Races ridden and win ratio of leading gentlemen jockeys in Ireland, 1871-77.

Dease is scathing of Greville’s stewardship. In his first year, sport could only be described as moderate; in 1873 the hounds took on the character of their master and became ‘decidedly flighty’; he kept up the numbers but not the efficiency of the pack; kennel management was none of the best; hounds that did not go fast enough were left at home and not even exercised; the master tired of the tasks he had undertaken.¹⁴⁹ Apart from the obvious personal bias of Dease, Greville’s riding record at the time of his Westmeath master-ship lends some validity to Dease’s claim as in 1873 he rode in a total of fifty-five races.

Itkowitz has characterised the 1880s as a time ‘when impecunious army officers or charlatans with no money took packs and hoped to live on the subscriptions padded out with clever horse trading’.¹⁵⁰ Two non-Westmeath army officers were appointed to the position between 1882-6 who proved to be neither impecunious nor charlatan. In September 1882, Captain William H. Macnaghten accepted a subscription of £800 and agreed to pay the earth-stoppers. The hunt committee were responsible for maintaining the country. Macnaghten had served with the Bengal Light Cavalry and

¹⁴⁹ Dease, *Westmeath hunt*, 75-8.
¹⁵⁰ Itzkowitz, *Peculiar privilege*, 93. see Dease, *Westmeath hunt*, 95, The Westmeath Hunt fell victim to one of these charlatans who also happened to be an army officer. Captain Cotton was appointed Master for the 1881-2 season and was advanced £300 of the agreed retainer. He was never to lead a hunt in the county and the Westmeath club were at a loss of £100.

came with considerable experience. He had hunted a pack of harriers at Eastbourne and had previously acted as master at Cattistock and Tipperary. The key role played by the huntsman and the risk inherent in the recruitment of a non-native of the county to the position were recognised by the stipulation by the committee that the resident huntsman Will Matthews should be retained in his position. The hunt committee, at the end of Macnaghten's first year, refused to allow the master dispense with Matthews's services at the expense of losing him.¹⁵¹ Macnaghten's replacement was Captain Towers-Clarke, from the 1st Royals who were based in Longford. Towers-Clarke had hunted with the Westmeath hounds prior to his appointment as Master and again personal contact was an important factor in his recruitment as his friendship with Captain Cecil Fetherstonhaugh of the same regiment was crucial to his acceptance.¹⁵² Towers-Clarke had a successful three-season tenure as master. He invested considerable personal resources in 'supplying good sport'. Coverts were planted and earth stopping improved, an improvement attributed to the master's generosity and prompt payment.¹⁵³

The final county resident masters who acted during the period of this study were members of two of the leading families in the county. Lord Greville acted as master between 1886-93 and was succeeded by the Pakenham brothers who acted as joint masters between 1893-1900. Greville's accession to the position completed an impressive *curriculum vita* that included the most important public positions available to an aristocrat of the day.¹⁵⁴ Lord Greville used his English contacts and personal finances to considerably upgrade the quality of the hounds for the 1890 season through crossing with the most noted English packs including Lord Fitzharding's South Cheshire and Lord Chesham's Cotswolds.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ Dease, *Westmeath hunt*, 96.

¹⁵² Ibid, 99.

¹⁵³ Ibid, 105.

¹⁵⁴ John Bateman, *Great landowners*, xxi. see also *Burke's peerage*, At the most basic level he served as a Justice of the Peace and Deputy Lieutenant, 'local services that are the usual penalties of greatness' according to Bateman. He represented Westmeath as MP between 1863-74 during which time he also enjoyed an administrative career at national level. He acted as groom-in-waiting to Queen Victoria between 1868-73 and was a Lord of the Treasury between 1873-4. During his time in the military he had acted as a Captain in the First Life Guards.

¹⁵⁵ *WG*, 7 Nov. 1890

Greville was succeeded by the two Pakenham brothers, members of another family with a distinguished military record. At the time of their accession both were following military careers.¹⁵⁶ The brothers remained in military service and organised alternate leave that allowed one or other of the brothers to be in Westmeath hunt country during the season. They invested considerable energy and finance in developing the hunt during their joint tenure. A stud of twenty-one horses was maintained along with forty-four and a half couple of hounds. The brothers put infrastructure in place that improved the hunting country. Bridges, bridle paths and passes were put in place that opened previously inaccessible areas to the hunt. Their financial input will be examined in the following section.

The Westmeath Hunt Club moved outside the ranks of the local landed gentry to recruit the two masters that served in the final years of this study. The minute books for this crucial period in the history of the Westmeath hunt are missing so that no insights are available on what motivated the decisions at the time. The likelihood is that the members had exhausted the generosity of the local gentry at a time of landlord retrenchment. This was a time when the hunt was continually targeted as a vehicle for political protest so that individuals that carried no local identity or magisterial powers were the preferred choice. The method of recruitment however remained the same. The position was filled by an individual known to the hunt committee and one with a proven record of achievement. James B. Charters was the replacement for the Pakenham brothers and had previously served with the Limerick and the east Galway hunts.¹⁵⁷ He was already familiar with Westmeath hunting territory and had organised a joint meet between the East Galway Hunt and their Westmeath counterparts. Charters was unfortunate as his term in office was characterised by continual attempts to stop or sabotage the hunt.

Harry Whitworth, of Oakley Park, Clonsilla, Dublin, ‘an owner of considerable quantity of property in England and Ireland’ succeeded Charters. Prior to his appointment he acted as joint master of the Galway hunt in association with Mr Fred

¹⁵⁶ Lord Longford was a subaltern in the 2nd Life Guards and the Honourable Edward Pakenham was in the Coldstreams.

¹⁵⁷ *British Hunts and Huntsmen*, 407.

Poyser.¹⁵⁸ Whitworth was deeply involved in the world of Irish steeplechasing prior to his arrival in Westmeath. In 1902 he owned and rode the winner of the three premier hunt cup races in Ireland namely the Kildare, Meath and Ward Union Cups.¹⁵⁹ His wealth made him the ideal choice at the time, which he dispensed liberally in the cause of promoting 'sport' in the county. The Harry Whitworth Cup valued at £100 was presented for competition at the annual Westmeath Hunt Club races and a trophy of similar value was presented for the Mullingar summer meet. He presented the Whitworth Plate of £60 for competition at the Mullingar Autumn meet, a free to enter event confined to farmers holding land in the Westmeath hunting district.¹⁶⁰ His generosity transcended the classes. He donated a set of twenty-six alphabetical hunting pictures for their newly established billiard room to the members of St Michael's club in Castlepollard.¹⁶¹ Whitworth was deprived of a chance of winning the Irish Grand National of 1908 when his horse Exelite was beaten by two lengths by Lord Rivers, a horse owned and trained by P. McLoughlin from Stonehall, Multyfarnham, one of the farmer members of the Westmeath Hunt Club.¹⁶²

The success of the master depended on the quality of the professional staff that formed part of his management team. The huntsman, who was responsible for the hounds in kennel and in the field, was the most important of these. Expertise in the handling, management and behaviour of the three sets of animals he dealt with, horses, foxes and hounds, was crucial to a successful career as a huntsman. His status was that of a servant, his position dependent largely on the support of the master. This was given legal validity in 1864 when the Court of Common Pleas ruled that a huntsman was a menial servant and therefore could be dismissed on one month's notice rather than the twelve months that many believed was necessary. Despite this tenuous status, the huntsman was an especially favoured servant who enjoyed a certain amount of local celebrity, a man who associated on terms of familiarity, with

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 382.

¹⁵⁹ *WE*, 21 March 1903.

¹⁶⁰ *WE*, 20 June 1903

¹⁶¹ *WE*, 18 Nov. 1905.

¹⁶² Guy St. John Williams and Francis P.M. Hyland, *Jameson Irish Grand National, a history of Ireland's premier steeplechase*, Dublin, 1995, 66-7. Whitworth moved to Yorkshire to take on the York and Ainsty hounds when he retired as Westmeath master but maintained his racing interests in Ireland. One of the earliest advocates of the benefits of weighing horses regularly and gauging their progress by their weight increase while at work he ended his association with Irish racing in 1920 when his thoroughbred He Goes was a winner in the Irish Derby (Williams and Hyland, *The Irish Derby, 1867-1979*, London, 1980, 164-5).

some of the highest-ranking individuals in the county.¹⁶³ His position, allied to his skill and expertise created social and economic opportunities that were unique to the position. In monetary terms the skill of the huntsman was valued at between £80 to £100 per year in mid century and according to Itzkowitz the huntsman's salary occasionally reached as high as £200 by the end of the century combined with accommodation near the kennels and hunting clothes.¹⁶⁴ In his final years as huntsman Will Matthews was paid £250 annually.¹⁶⁵

The position was a particularly important one to the members of the Westmeath Hunt Club as it was the means of maintaining continuity and stability of management. Will Matthews, provided the stability and expertise that allowed the members to enjoy their activity without major disruption. He was first appointed to the county as first whip in 1871 and in 1875 was promoted to huntsman.¹⁶⁶ Matthews was however eventually to experience the tenuous nature of the post in 1900 when M. B. Charters succeeded the Pakenham brothers as master and recruited his brother-in-law G. T. Heigham as huntsman. The status of the position and the important contribution made by Matthews to successful hunting was recognised by the members who presented him with a cheque for £350.¹⁶⁷ He was also made a presentation of eight couple of hounds by the Earl of Longford that were used to form the core of a private pack organised by Arthur Boyd Rochfort, of Midleton Park, Castletown-Geoghegan in November 1900.¹⁶⁸ Matthews was appointed first whip and kennel huntsman at a salary of £50 for acting in capacity of huntsman and £50 for the keep and care of the hounds.¹⁶⁹ This harrier pack hunted once a week but the relationship with Matthews ended in some controversy and the nature of the agreement between Matthews and Mrs Boyd-Rochfort was the subject of a number of court proceedings. Matthews was eventually to achieve the ultimate promotion and in 1905 became the master of the Roscommon Hunt Club. The main assistant to the huntsman was the whipper-in, whose main duty was to keep the hounds together in the field, discipline them and

¹⁶³ Itzkowitz, *Peculiar privilege*, 94-5.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 95.

¹⁶⁵ *WG*, 22 April 1904.

¹⁶⁶ Dease, *Westmeath hunt*, 55-7; 80.

¹⁶⁷ *WE*, 17 Nov. 1900; *WG*, 16 Oct. 1903.

¹⁶⁸ *WG*, 16 Oct. 1903; *WE*, 24 Nov. 1900.

¹⁶⁹ *WG*, 16 Oct. 1903.

assist in the stables.¹⁷⁰ Throughout the period of this study the holders of the position were recruited from outside the county with the majority sourced from England.¹⁷¹

These were the critical professional servants of the hunt. An important element of the infrastructure of the activity and part of the informal economy of the county were the earth-stoppers, a group of people who worked during the night prior to the hunt. Their duties were ‘to stop every drain, shore or rabbit hole into which a fox could squeeze himself, on the whole of their beats, or farms of which they have charge and to keep the rabbit holes closed during the entire hunting season’.¹⁷² Payment to these individuals was normally the responsibility of the master. In 1882, Captain Macnaghten paid the night stoppers 5s. each, the morning stoppers 2s 6d each and those who found foxes were paid 10s inclusive of stops.¹⁷³

Financing the Hunt

The records of the Westmeath Hunt Club provide useful evidence for examining the means by which a sporting activity was financed and managed at the local level between 1850-1905. This material allows a detailed examination of the finances of the club and the methods adopted by the members to manage its financial affairs. The fact that this activity supported by the elite of local society experienced financial trauma is revealing and is indicative of the level of difficulty faced by the lower classes in financing and managing their chosen sport.

The expense of managing a subscription pack such as the Westmeath one depended on a number of factors. The number of days hunted determined the number of hounds and horses needed. In the 1890s an additional £100 was requested when hunting was extended to four days a week. The style in which the establishment was kept, the quality of horses bought for hunt servants, the salaries paid to hunt servants, the quality of their uniforms, the nature of the hunting country which determined the sums needed for earth-stopping or covert maintenance, all influenced annual club expenditure.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ Itzkowitz, *Peculiar privilege*, 95.

¹⁷¹ Dease, *Westmeath hunt*.

¹⁷² *WE*, 14 May 1898.

¹⁷³ WHCMB, minute of 9 Sept. 1882.

¹⁷⁴ Itzkowitz, *Peculiar privilege*, 78.

The subscription club incurred two general categories of expense. There were the normal annual costs and there were occasional large expenses for events such as the planting of additional coverts or repair to hunt stables or kennels. The major source of finance was the annual individual member's subscriptions. This sum was used to pay the master his guarantee and on occasion wasn't sufficient for this purpose. The value of these subscriptions and the number of subscribers for the seasons 1890-1 to 1900-01 is illustrated in Table 8. The values indicate the extent of the decline in the annual subscriptions, as in 1875 a sum of £1,172 was subscribed by 105 subscribers.

Season	Amount subscribed	Number of subscribers
1890-1	£829 17s.	99
1891-2	£793 13s.	101
1892-3	£826 4s.	107
1893-4	£941 7s.	116
1894-5	£873 15s.	104
1895-6	£854 15s.	103
1896-7	£820 14s.	101
1897-8	£826 4s.	108
1898-9	£774 17s.	103
1899-00	£814 16s.	103
1900-01	£988 13s.	114

Source: Account material of Westmeath Hunt Club.

Table 8: Subscriptions to the Westmeath Hunt Club 1890-1901.

The major annual expense incurred was the amount of the agreed guarantee paid to the master. This fee was normally close to £1,000 in the 1870s but was reduced in the 1880s and 1890s. In the 1870s, Montague Chapman's guarantee amounted to £1,000 in addition to the field money. The hunt club committee accepted responsibility for keeping the kennels in repair and paying their rent.¹⁷⁵ In 1882, the committee agreed with Captain W. Macnaghten to hunt the country three days a fortnight in return for a guarantee of £800. Macnaghten also retained the field money and was responsible for the payment of all earth stoppers. The hunt committee were responsible for the management of the country and the payment of fowl money.¹⁷⁶ Lord Greville was paid the same amount, a sum that was increased to £900 in 1888 but was reduced to

¹⁷⁵ WHCMB, minute of 12 May 1877.

¹⁷⁶ WHCMB, minute of 9 Sept 1882.

£800 in the 1892-3 season.¹⁷⁷ The Longfords' guarantee was increased to £900 when they offered to hunt the county four times weekly in the 1896 season.¹⁷⁸

Ancillary events increased the financial pressure on the club and placed additional demands on individual subscribers but had the advantage of improving the social dimension of the activity. Race meetings struggled to break even and the great social event of the season, the hunt ball, did not always return a profit. Expenditure exceeded income by £28 for the 1893-4 ball, for example.¹⁷⁹ The inclusion of races confined to farmers in the annual race meetings was the most expensive aspect of organising race events. These were confined to farmers whose lands were hunted in the course of the season and entry to these was encouraged by keeping entry fees deliberately low and by offering significant cash prizes. The 1891 race meet accounts show that expenditure exceeded income by £10 13s. 10d. for instance. Almost half of the expenditure on the meet was for prize money in the farmers' races for which entry fees were 2s. 6d. each compared to 12s. 6d. required for entry to the members' races. The winner of the farmers' race received £15 with £5 for the second placed owner.¹⁸⁰ Considerable time was devoted to discussing the organisation and management of the race meetings in the 1890s according to the minute books. Finally, in November 1904 it was decided that race accounts were to be kept separate from the hunt accounts and that the hunt committee would no longer be responsible for the finances of the races.¹⁸¹ A year later the committee members distanced themselves even further from the finances of the races. They decided that the races were to be run independently of the hunt subscribers, a race committee was appointed to collect subscriptions, and races weren't to be held unless sufficient funds were collected.¹⁸²

The period covered by the minute books from 1877 to 1905 was dominated by financial discussions. Officials and committee members were stretched to the limit trying to persuade members to meet their financial commitments and to subscribe necessary maintenance funds. In the 1877-8 season the energy of the secretary was

¹⁷⁷ WHCMB, minute of 6 April 1888, 28 January 1892.

¹⁷⁸ WHCMB, minute of 2 May 1895.

¹⁷⁹ WHCFR

¹⁸⁰ WHCFR.

¹⁸¹ WHCMB, minute of 25 Nov. 1904.

¹⁸² WHCMB, minute of 19 Oct. 1905.

devoted to encouraging the members to subscribe to the kennel repair fund and to clear the deficit on the fund.¹⁸³ Over the period subscriptions were sourced for the retirement of huntsman Will Matthews, for presentations to retired MFHs, for covert maintenance, kennel repair, for steeplechases and point-to-point meets, for the fowl damage fund, hunt ball deficits, for wedding presents for Lord Longford, and the purchase of horses and hounds. The list must have seemed endless for the individual subscriber.

These demands were made at a time when the landlords faced serious economic challenges. Sustained economic depression, declining rental income and lowered rents under the terms of the 1881 Land Act meant that landlords were unable to meet interest obligations for earlier borrowings. Nationally, renewed agricultural depression from the mid-1880s that was accompanied by the Land League inspired Plan of Campaign meant that rental incomes declined still further.¹⁸⁴ The effects of the land war and the accompanied depression did not impact as acutely on Westmeath as in many other counties but the events outlined above did impact on the economic performances of many estates. From 1882 to 1902, 5,183 Westmeath tenants entered the land courts and had their rents reduced by 18.3 per cent under the fair rent fixing terms of the 1881 Land Act. As a result, landlords' rental income declined by more than £32,000.¹⁸⁵ Under the terms of the Arrears of Rent Act of 1882, 199 Westmeath landlords had £17, 797 extinguished from their rentals.¹⁸⁶

An insider's view of the attitude of key members of the Westmeath hunt community to the reluctant subscribers is provided by the correspondence of Gerard Dease to the *Westmeath Guardian* in March and May 1900. The retirement of the benevolent Lord Longford as MFH encouraged some members and in particular Dease to challenge the

¹⁸³ WHCMB, minutes of 12 May 1877, 26 Oct. 1877, 21 March 1878.

¹⁸⁴ Dooley, *Sources*, 11.

¹⁸⁵ *A return showing according to provinces and counties the number of cases in which judicial rents have been fixed by all the methods provided by the Land Law Acts for a first and second statutory term, respectively, to 31 December 1902 with particulars as to acreage, former rents of holdings, and percentages of reductions in rents* HC 1903, lvii, 91, 374. For a similar analysis of the situation in the neighbouring county of Meath see, Terence A. M. Dooley, "A world turned upside down": a study of the changing social world of the landed nobility of County Meath, 1875-1945, in *Riocht na Midhe, Records of Meath Archaeological and Historical Society*, XII, 2001, 188-227.

¹⁸⁶ *Return of payments made to landlords by the Irish Land Commissions pursuant to the first and sixteenth sections of the Arrears of Rent (Ireland) Act 1882*, HC, 1884, lxiv.107.

parsimonious subscribers.¹⁸⁷ Dease claimed that many could afford to contribute more than they were giving and that it was absurd to believe that a man who could afford to keep a hunter, could not give more than £5 in subscription. In 'second-rate English counties' the minimum subscription was £25 and Dease argued that it was wrong to expect to have sport supported at another's expense. 'If a man was fond of shooting he does not ask a rich man to pay for his cartridges and why should he ask him to pay for his hunting'. Occasional hunters or men with one horse subscribed as much as men with several horses who took their family members out or who used the hunting field for horse training or dealing. Dease believed that the sum of £850 subscribed to the county pack was 'almost ludicrous under present conditions' and that

Hunting cannot be kept up with any success or credit in this county if the bulk of members are not prepared to put their hands a little deeper into their pockets, and unless the subs to all funds are paid with more regularity.

It is difficult to estimate the annual expenditure incurred by an individual involved in hunting. An English estimate calculated that an initial investment of £140 and annual costs of £40 were required which to the outside observer suggested that hunting was a costly sport but 'considering the health and pleasure, that it affords, it most assuredly is not'.¹⁸⁸ A Westmeath estimate, in 1897, suggested that the costs were similar, with keep and maintenance of a horse estimated at £35 annually, and when subscription costs and other essential contributions are included, then a sum in excess of £50 was likely.¹⁸⁹

Apart from the range of duties already outlined the master of the Westmeath Hunt in the 1890s dispersed considerable patronage to the organisation. The Longfords were particularly generous in this respect with the patronage taking a variety of forms. In January 1890, the Hon. Edward Pakenham agreed to pay the deficit of £23 on the race accounts due from the previous year.¹⁹⁰ In 1893, the brothers donated £55 to help clear the deficit from the 1891-2 season.¹⁹¹ In December 1898 they agreed to carry out

¹⁸⁷ *WG*, 30 March 1900, 11 May 1900. The latter challenge was in the form of an open letter to the subscribers.

¹⁸⁸ F.G. Aflalo (ed), *The cost of sport*, London, 1899, 151.

¹⁸⁹ *WE*, 6 March 1897.

¹⁹⁰ WHCMB, minute of 23 Jan. 1890.

¹⁹¹ WHCFR

the kennel repairs at their own expense.¹⁹² In addition, the list of subscribers for the three seasons 1890-1 to 1892-3 was headed by the Earl of Longford with donations of £60 each season and topped by a subscription of £100 in the season 1890-1.¹⁹³ The influence of the family was also responsible for the return of their neighbouring aristocrat, Major Pollard-Urquhart, as a leading subscriber in the period of their mastership. In five successive seasons between 1893 and 1897 he subscribed £50 each season and £40 in each season 1898-1900.¹⁹⁴

Social Life and the Hunt

Hunting provided the fulcrum around which much of the social life of its participants and supporters revolved from the opening of the cubbing season in October to the conclusion of the hunting season in April. Hunt sponsored balls, dinners, puppy shows, breakfasts, fund raising entertainments, steeplechasing and point-to-point racing events contributed to the style of life of a hunting district and were a central part of the social life of the resident landed gentry. The hunt ball was the major social event for the gentry of the region. The first hunt ball advertised for the Westmeath Hunt club was that of 1865 when Ballinlough Castle, Delvin was the advertised venue.¹⁹⁵ The earliest documented hunt ball in Westmeath was held in 1866 and was attended by over 260 guests. This was hosted by the founding father of the Westmeath Hunt Club, Sir Richard Levinge at his Knockdrin Castle seat (Figure 5). The mansion offered ‘ample dimensions, great accommodation,’ and proximity to Mullingar, the venue of the ‘most important station on the Midland Railway’.¹⁹⁶ Early hunt balls were held in the natural environment of the mansions of the leading aristocrats, a feature that added to their exclusivity and attractiveness. Richard C. Levinge hosted the 1871 ball at his seat at Levington Park. The host was prepared to remodel some of his rooms to facilitate the large attendance of guests. The walls between two reception rooms were removed to create adequate space for dancing while two other rooms were converted into one to provide a supper room. On the night, the rooms and corridors were richly ornamented with draperies, evergreens and trophies of the

¹⁹² WHCMB, minute of 1 Dec. 1898,

¹⁹³ WHCFR.

¹⁹⁴ WHCFR.

¹⁹⁵ *WG*, 2 Feb. 1865.

¹⁹⁶ *WG*, 1 Feb. 1866.

chase.¹⁹⁷ Catering was of the highest professional quality. The main meal was supplied by Mr Ingram Murphy, recruited from Harcourt Street in Dublin and was of ‘the most *recherché* description and the wines furnished by Messrs. Heinekey were equally choice’.¹⁹⁸ Throughout the 1870s the hunt ball took precedence over all other local social events, lapsed for some years in the 1880s but was revived in 1889 and attracted 180 guests to the Military Barracks.¹⁹⁹ It continued throughout the 1890s with the Military gymnasium the usual host venue with one of the most spectacular events held in January 1905 promoted by the ‘Fox-Hunting Bachelors in Westmeath’. About 300 attended the event, at which the floor was overcrowded during some of the dances and ‘the diversified dresses of the ladies, the scarlet coats of the huntsmen, and the sombre evening dress of the remaining gentlemen, intermingled in brilliant contrast’.²⁰⁰



Figure 5: Knockdrin Castle, county Westmeath, seat of Sir Richard Levinge and venue for several hunt balls.

On other occasions, especially in the 1870s, the Courthouse in Mullingar hosted the ball with the 1872 event a particularly spectacular one.²⁰¹ Here ‘two apartments were

¹⁹⁷ *WG*, 26 Jan. 1871.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ *WG*, 8 March 1889.

²⁰⁰ *WG*, 3 Feb. 1905

²⁰¹ Dease, *Westmeath hunt*, 70.

prepared for dancing'. Mr Liddel's string band was placed in the Grand Jury room and the 'splendid band of the 97th Regiment' was based in the 'spacious hall of the Court'.²⁰² The three categories of venue used encapsulated the wealth, social standing and power of the participants. The big houses provided the power symbols of the local landscape; the Courthouse where administrative and judicial power was exercised and the Mullingar military barracks that expressed the symbiotic relationship between landed gentry and army officership.

Hunt dinners were normally an exclusively male event organised on special occasions such as those held to mark the retirement of important hunt personnel and towards the end of the century more paternalist events were organised when the annual earth stoppers dinners were hosted. Annual hunt club races were an important local sporting event providing a form of sporting entertainment to all classes. Held towards the end of the hunting season, the races provided one of the final opportunities for the followers of the hunt to assemble and socialise en masse before dispersing for the summer season. Only a minority of subscribers actually participated or offered financial support to the steeplechase races but the ancillary social events associated with the races attracted a wide range of support. The social dimension of the hunt was extended considerably during the master-ship of Harry Whitworth (1903-1909). Joint meetings with neighbouring packs were organised and the sporting dimension was extended to the playing of a soccer match between the footballers of the Westmeath Hunt Club and the Galway 'Blazers' who chartered a special train for the journey to Mullingar.²⁰³

More informal social activities were also part of the hunting experience. The concept of the hunt breakfast was important at different stages during the second half of the nineteenth century. Captain Charles Coote began his first outing on 30 October 1871 with a champagne breakfast held at his Culleen base. As the size of hunting fields increased hunt breakfasts and mid-hunt dinners became more difficult to organise but they were a feature encouraged by Lord Greville during his master-ship (1886-93). The consumption of alcohol was a vital ingredient of this socialisation. The hip flask was as much a part of the hunter's equipment as stirrups and acted as a stimulant,

²⁰² *WG*, 1 Feb. 1872.

²⁰³ *WG*, 9 Feb. 1905.

protection against the cold and a social lubricant as it was passed around amongst friends.²⁰⁴ The ‘socialisation’ of a group known as the ‘Longford Slashers’ who regularly hunted in Westmeath in the 1850s is illustrative of the strong drinking culture that surrounded male hunting at the time. They were noted for their ‘hard riding by day and hard drinking by night’ and at their regular meeting place at Bunbrosna egg-flip and hot punch consumed out of stable buckets was the favoured refreshment.²⁰⁵ The 1862 diary of Laeda Reynell illustrates the centrality of hunting to the social life of the male members of the Reynell family. Almost all of the family friends were members of the Westmeath Hunt Club. Many came to dine and stay overnight at the family home at Killynon during 1862. Reynell family members regularly visited the home of some of these members, on social visits. Eliza’s brother Dick during the 1862 season visited the homes of many of those listed as subscribers of the Westmeath hunt in that year, often staying overnight in preparation for the following days hunt.²⁰⁶

Polo: an alternative equestrian outlet for Westmeath’s sporting gentry

Despite the financial challenges faced by the hunting community in the 1890s and later, some members became involved in the financially demanding and socially exclusive sport of polo. According to one Irish source ‘to play polo regularly and in proper style costs a man as much as to hunt’.²⁰⁷ An English estimate, put the average cost at £102 for a London polo player, with a stable of two ponies and the required outfit, in addition to £58 to cover the season’s working expenses.²⁰⁸ Participation in polo at competitive level added to the expense. Away matches necessitated the transport of ponies to venues and required the availability of more than one mount. In Chapter 4 the association between cricket and the landed gentry will be examined but the sport faced a challenge for gentry’ loyalty from 1881 on when polo was available to cater for the sporting and equestrian summer pleasures of the landed wealthy and professional classes. Polo provided the local gentry with an opportunity to participate in an exclusive and elitist sporting activity that provided an equestrian continuity with winter hunting. The organisation of the game included a sporting and social construct,

²⁰⁴ Tony Collins and Wray Vamplew, *Mud, sweat and beers, a cultural history of sport and alcohol*, Oxford, 2002, 69-70.

²⁰⁵ Dease, *Westmeath hunt*, 13.

²⁰⁶ NLI, Reynell Papers, ‘The diary of Laeda Reynell’, 1862, P.C. 601 (II).

²⁰⁷ Harry M. Sargent, *Thoughts upon sport*, London, 1894, 291.

²⁰⁸ Aflalo, *Cost of sport*, 297-9.

that involved intra-club members matches, inter-club games, regimental matches and from 1890, a national competition, managed by a national county polo association. Annual polo club races as well as a comprehensive range of social activities that culminated on at least two occasions with a polo club ball were also available to members. Polo with its social dimension, its equestrian sport and its annual race meet replicated in the summer what hunting offered in winter in a more reserved and exclusive setting.

Polo in Ireland

The 10th Hussars introduced polo to Ireland in 1871 and in 1872 the first game was played on Gormanstown Strand between teams representing county Meath, captained by John Watson, and the officers of the 9th Lancers.²⁰⁹ The establishment of the All-Ireland Polo Club in 1874 was an important milestone as this club received a free lease of a playing ground in the Phoenix Park with permission to construct a pavilion for the use of its members.²¹⁰ In polo's embryonic stage, the majority of the players were either serving soldiers or gentlemen who had returned to Ireland after a period of military service.²¹¹ John Watson who was master of the Meath Hunt between 1891-1908 is credited with transforming the game 'from chaos into scientific play'.²¹² According to *British Hunts and Huntsmen* it was his influence that destroyed the 'vulgar brawls from which, in the process of evolution, the game of polo-phoenix like has arisen'.²¹³ His introduction of the backhanded stroke to England, a revolutionary stroke he practised in India, entirely altered the character of the game.²¹⁴

Polo in Westmeath

Three polo clubs were established within the county. The Mullingar based Westmeath County Polo Club was the most important one and was founded on 8 April 1881 at a meeting held at the Greville Arms Hotel. The membership subscription was set at £1 1s. Gentlemen who became members after 15 May, the date set for the

²⁰⁹ Jack Leonard, 'Polo in Ireland' in, Noel Phillips Browne (ed.), *The horse in Ireland*, London, 1967, 179. Brian Smith, *The horse in Ireland*, 283.

²¹⁰ Leonard, 'Polo', 180.

²¹¹ Ibid, 181.

²¹² *British Hunts and Huntsmen*, 310. Watson founded the Freebooters team.

²¹³ Ibid, 310.

²¹⁴ Ibid, 310.

commencement of play, were required to pay an additional £1 entrance fee.²¹⁵ In 1900, the North Westmeath Club was established in Castlepollard when Lord Longford gave his demesne for 'the use of the gentry' during the season.²¹⁶ Four years later this ground had been considerably enlarged and boasted of a pavilion of 'generous proportions' described as 'a substantial and well appointed structure built of wood and contains *inter alia*, tea rooms, dressing rooms etc'.²¹⁷ The South Westmeath Club, was organised in the Moate district in 1903, due to the influence of Col. Harrington.²¹⁸ As a result of these developments, there were sufficient numbers involved to allow locally organised tournament games to take place in the early 1900s. A weeklong handicap tournament organised by the Westmeath Club was held at Ledeston in July 1904 in which each of the three Westmeath clubs entered two teams.²¹⁹ The following season six teams competed for Capt. Bayley's £50 Challenge Cup.²²⁰

The most important competitive outlet for the members of the Westmeath clubs was the annual All-Ireland County Club polo competition. This was introduced in an attempt to broaden the civilian appeal of the game. With this purpose in mind the Irish County Polo Club Union was established on 10 June 1890 at a meeting held in the Shelbourne Hotel, Dublin. The limited popularity of the game within the landed community at the time is evident from the presence of only five representatives of county polo clubs at the meeting, including John Lyons from Westmeath. The objective of the organisation was to promote the game of county polo and towards this intention it was decided to organise an annual competition for a polo challenge cup played under Hurlingham Club rules. More widespread civilian involvement was encouraged by restricting the eligibility to compete in these competitions. *Bona fide* clubs were required to have a club ground and regular and fixed days of play. Competition rules were designed to limit participation to the resident landed gentry. Eligible players had to reside in the county within twenty miles of the polo ground and to own or hold land in the county. Officers of the army and Navy were eligible to

²¹⁵ *WG*, 15 April 1881.

²¹⁶ *MR*, 22 March 1900.

²¹⁷ *WE*, 7 May 1905.

²¹⁸ *WI*, 14 March 1903.

²¹⁹ *WE*, 6 Aug. 1904.

²²⁰ *WE*, 29 July, 5 Aug. 1905.

play for their native county provided they had played at least twelve times during the season on the county club grounds.²²¹

The formal All-Ireland inter-county polo challenge cup competition was established in 1890. The popularity of the game in Westmeath and the quality of players was such that teams from the county were successful on a number of occasions in this competition. The Westmeath County Club were winners in 1896 and 1897 and the North Westmeath Club became All-Ireland champions in 1903, 1904 and 1905.²²² Two members of the North Westmeath Club, Percy O'Reilly and A. M. Rotherham, achieved their finest moment in sport at the 1908 Olympic Games when they represented an Irish team that were Olympic silver medallists.²²³ In 1905, they were members of an Irish team that beat England for the first time in an annual contest for the Patriotic Cup.²²⁴ Rotherham was educated at Cheltenham and the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, where presumably he was initiated in the skills of the game.

The formation of two new clubs in Westmeath in the early 1900s was a reflection of the growing popularity of the game nationally. Only 5 clubs contested the 1896 competition, this number had increased to 8 in 1903 and 9 in 1904. The columns of the *Irish Field* carried regular advertisements for tournaments organised by clubs.²²⁵

The Westmeath County Club had its first ground at Belmont, the residence of Roland Hudson, who was responsible for introducing the game to the county.²²⁶ In 1882, Ledeston, the demesne of J. C. Lyons, became the polo headquarters of the county. The switch from the 'rough and ready ground' at Belmont was accompanied by the decision to affiliate non-playing members' after which the club progressed rapidly with the erection of a pavilion and a properly prepared ground.²²⁷ In 1885, the club claimed to be the only *bona fide* county club in Ireland 'the great difficulty in obtaining a suitable ground for the game probably being the chief obstacle'.²²⁸ Apart from the grounds the venue provided stabling for the polo ponies, 'a fixed refreshment

²²¹ NLI, Minute book of Irish County Polo Club Union, Ms. 16830.

²²² Minute book of ICPCU; WE, 29 Aug. 1903.

²²³ Bill Mallon and Ian Buchanan, *The 1908 Olympic Games; results for all competitors in all events with commentary*, Jefferson, North Carolina, 2000, 205-7.

²²⁴ Leonard, 'Polo', 181.

²²⁵ *Irish Field*, 22 Aug. 1903; 29 Aug. 1903; 20 Aug. 1904.

²²⁶ Dease, *Westmeath hunt*, 102.

²²⁷ *WG*, 10 June 1887.

²²⁸ *WG*, 14 Aug. 1885.

bar and dressing room', and a marquee for the ladies. Tuesday and Friday evenings were polo playing days and those who required transport to the venue could travel by brake from the Market House for the 'reasonable charge of 1s. 6d'.²²⁹ Friday evening sessions were normally accompanied by a musical recital courtesy of the military band. Socialisation was facilitated by the sale of excisable liquor at the club's refreshment bar between the hours of eight in the morning and ten at night.

A surviving rules and byelaw booklet from 1905 provides evidence of the nature of the club and its activities. In 1905 the club had a membership of eighty-four as well as the officers of the Connaught Rangers.²³⁰ At this time the County Carlow Club had a membership of thirty-five.²³¹ Those who found the sport too demanding physically or too expensive but who wished to participate in the exclusive socialisation offered by the club had the option of becoming non-playing members of the club. Playing members paid a subscription of £2. 2s. and a similar entrance fee. Non-playing members paid half the standard fees.²³² In 1905, the membership list isn't categorised but in 1911 there were thirty-five playing and forty-four non-playing members.²³³ The social milieu of the club guaranteed elitism and the rules were designed to maintain its exclusiveness. Membership was achieved by being proposed and seconded followed by a ballot amongst the members. According to rule 9 one black ball in eight excluded a potential member.²³⁴ A member who behaved in an 'obnoxious' manner or whose conduct was 'unbecoming' of a gentleman was liable to expulsion.²³⁵ As with other clubs that catered for a similar clientele, the Westmeath Club made special efforts to cater for the requirements of the military. Officers of the Army, Navy and Auxiliary forces not having a residence in Westmeath were admitted without having to pay an entrance fee and the committee had the power to offer honorary membership to officers quartered at Mullingar, Athlone and Longford.²³⁶

²²⁹ *WE*, 21 May 1892.

²³⁰ *WCL, Rules and bye-laws of the Westmeath Polo Club*, 1905, Mullingar, 1905, 7-8.

²³¹ Hugh Dolan (ed.), 'County Carlow Polo Club' in *Carloviana, journal of the old Carlow society*, 30, 1983, 11.

²³² *WCL, Rules and bye-laws, 1905*, Mullingar, 1905, 7-8. Membership of the elite Hurlingham Polo club in London cost £5 5s. at the time. (Aflalo, *The cost of sport*, 299)

²³³ *WCL, Rules and bye-laws of the Westmeath Polo Club*, 1911, Mullingar, 1911, 5-6.

²³⁴ *Rules and bye-laws*, 1905, 3.

²³⁵ *Ibid*, 4.

²³⁶ *Ibid*, 3.

The Westmeath County Polo Club was the exclusive preserve of representatives of social class A. The membership list of 1905 contained eighty-four individual males and seventy have been positively identified and were all either members of the Westmeath based landed gentry, men with private income, army officers or members of the wealthiest sections of the professional community. The age of the members ranged from twenty-five to seventy-four, with an average age of 46.51 years.²³⁷ The membership of seven titled aristocrats included four peers, Lords Castlemaine, Greville, Longford and Kilmaine; two baronets – Sir Richard Levinge and Sir Walter Nugent and the Honourable Edward Pakenham. Twenty held military titles or were current army officers and the list also included four doctors, three lawyers, three bank managers, the assistant county surveyor, the MFH, a race-horse trainer, the resident magistrate, J. H. Locke of the Kilbeggan distillery firm and the county inspector of the RIC. Forty-eight individuals were members of Westmeath landed families. Those who held military titles included regular officers who lived in the district and held individual membership and members of the county gentry who retained their ranks from army service. The membership was also closely associated with the hunting community. An examination of the list of subscribers to the hunt in 1900-01 indicates that 54 per cent of the polo club members of 1905 had subscribed to the hunt in that year.²³⁸ The membership of the polo club included some of the better-known personalities of Westmeath hunting society and the 1905 list of members included two previous holders of the position of MFH as well as the current incumbent. In 1878 John Lawrence suggested that hunting and cricket were complementary and that cricket ‘formed a bond of union between the country gentlemen of the day; and the same sportsmen who met in winter by the covert side, hailed each other again joyfully in summer’.²³⁹ In Westmeath, as the century progressed, this function was increasingly fulfilled by the polo club.

Polo provided a structured and location specific recreational activity unlike the more peripatetic and *ad hoc* nature of cricket that depended on individual invitation, initiative and effort to organise an event. At this stage it provided the kind of pastoral setting later associated with golf. It was the locus around which the ‘pick and

²³⁷ Calculation based on the average age of forty-seven members.

²³⁸ This is the nearest available subscribers’ list for comparison.

²³⁹ *Lawrence handbook*, 1878, 19.

fashion' of the surrounding counties could assemble amidst 'the magnificent scenery of Nonsuch (Castlepollard), with its splendid trees; also the lofty castle which stands in a quaintly terraced hill overlooking many beautiful lakes which appeared so picturesque to the strangers'.²⁴⁰ Ledeston offered a social world where afternoon tea was served in the large marquee, the pavilion where 'cold tea' and other light refreshments were to be had without stint' and with military bands present to 'play a charming selection of music'.²⁴¹ The members occasionally indulged in other sporting activities at the grounds including clay pigeon shooting and engaged in the occasional cricket match.²⁴²

The annual polo club races constituted an additional layer of recreational activity. They began in 1881 at Belmont where a programme of 'five events, which, with a challenge match produced a first class evenings sport'.²⁴³ The races effectively brought the polo season to a close and as one report noted a 'polo race will always partake more of the nature of a social than a great public function' where the rank and fashion were largely in evidence.²⁴⁴ The emphasis was as much on the entertainment as on the racing and club members and individuals took advantage of the occasion to entertain friends. In this way, the races fulfilled a similar purpose to the annual hunt club steeplechase and point-to-point race meetings. At the 1901 event, for instance, 'hospitality was liberally dispensed by the members of the club in the pavilion and also by Mr. Boyd-Rochfort, J. H. Locke and others'.²⁴⁵ Musical entertainment provided by the band of the Mullingar based regiment, was a constant feature of the races. The programme presented by the band of the East Lancashire Regiment at the 1892 meet is representative of the musical entertainment presented and is illustrated in Table 9.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁰ *WE*, 22 Aug. 1903.

²⁴¹ *WG*, 10 July 1887.

²⁴² *WG*, 12 Aug. 1887.

²⁴³ *WG*, 26 Aug. 1881.

²⁴⁴ *WG*, 20 Sept. 1895. See *Westmeath Guardian*, 22 July 1892 and 22 September 1893 for particularly comprehensive attendance lists which included representatives of numerous landed families in the county.

²⁴⁵ *WE*, 28 Sept. 1901.

²⁴⁶ *WG*, 22 July 1892.

Category	Title	Composer
March	The Duke of York	Paget
Overture	The ruler of spirits	Weber
Quadrilles	Covent Garden	Coote
Valse (Militaire)	The Grenadiers	Waldteufel
Fantasia	Paul Jones	Planquette
Valse	Unter den Linden	Gingl
Selection	Maritana	Kappey

Source: *Westmeath Guardian*, 22 July 1892.

Table 9: Programme of music presented at the Polo races in 1892 by the East Lancashire Regiment Band.

The introduction of the All-Ireland Challenge Cup added to the social dimension of the game as from 1896 it was decided to play all matches in the competition in Dublin, and these were normally held in the month of August either prior to or after Horse Show week. In the 1896 final, won by Westmeath, it was reported that ‘the two counties were represented by many of both sexes who came to town purposely to see the match’. There was a very ‘smart and fashionable gathering on the Pavilion and in the Inclosure [sic] where the 13th Hussars had a big tea table and dispensed hospitality’.²⁴⁷ According to the *Irish Field* ‘there was a large turn out [sic] of smart vehicles of all kinds and description containing elegantly attired ladies who always make it a point to show up at such functions’.²⁴⁸

Conclusion

Hunting transcended sport. It was the essential compound that bound a particular community together and set them apart from other groups. Some members of this community were active as local administrators, some shared the common bond of a military career, a minority found conviviality in membership of a Dublin or London club, denominational allegiance and political affiliation were also unifying elements but the community dimension was created by the commonality of the shared hunting experience. Hunting re-generated and re-energised the community on an annual basis as the members assembled each September to renew their activities following the diversions and divisions of the summer season. In 1905, it was an ageing community that found it difficult to meet the financial demands that were essential to the survival

²⁴⁷ *Vanity Fair*, 23 Aug. 1896.

²⁴⁸ *Irish Field*, 29 Aug. 1896.

of the activity, with its members suffering from the trauma associated with a decline in political, social and economic power, a trauma that was intensified by the frequent attempts made to interfere with the sacrosanct activity. However, there is no evidence to support the suggestion of R.V. Comerford that attempts to stop the hunt were actually welcomed by some landlords who were becoming increasingly indebted.²⁴⁹ The opposite was the case in Westmeath in the early 1900s where attempts to interfere with the right of the members to hunt were resisted in the strongest manner.

As the powerbrokers in their local districts, members of the hunting community were responsible for the diffusion of several different sporting disciplines at county level. They exercised a central importance in the spread of sport. Cricket, polo and tennis in particular were closely associated with members of the hunting community; the latter two sports remained the preserve of landed society but cricket became increasingly broad based and democratised as the century concluded. Members of the community provided much of the patronage essential for the survival of a variety of the sporting disciplines examined in this study. This varied from financial support, to facility provision, to the supply of prizes for particular events. This importance was recognised by the athlete Tom Davin, in the course of a meeting of the Carrick-on-Suir branch of the Land League, where a discussion took place on the plan to prevent Lord Waterford from hunting. Davin unsuccessfully opposed the moves to stop hunting and pointedly argued that ‘if you stop fox-hunting you will stop every sort of sport in Ireland’.²⁵⁰

The ephemeral nature of the sport’s club is a recurring theme of this study, a condition partly associated with financial instability. This chapter has highlighted the difficulties faced by the Westmeath Hunt Club. The evidence from this analysis suggests that many members of this society were as dependent on the wealthy benefactor as were the members of clubs that catered for the lower levels of society. Itzkowitz has shown that many British hunts faced serious financial challenges from the 1870s.²⁵¹ The difference in Westmeath was that the landed gentry were dependent on their own resources to finance the sport. The middle-class passion for the hunting

²⁴⁹ R.V. Comerford, *The Fenians in context: Irish politics and society 1848-82* Dublin, 1985, 236.

²⁵⁰ *Waterford Daily Mail*, 22 September 1881.

²⁵¹ Itzkowitz, *Peculiar privilege*, 157.

field with its strict utilitarian purpose for the rural upper classes did not manifest itself in Westmeath.²⁵²

Hunting provided women with an opportunity for public participation in sport during the Victorian era. Prior to their public participation in hunting, Westmeath women competed in archery competitions in the privacy of the landed demesne. This changed and hunting became increasingly popular with some of the wives and daughters of the landed estate proprietor as the century progressed, so that by 1906 over one-third of the members of the Westmeath club were women. The notion that the home was the woman's domain, where she was increasingly confined by a contemporary discourse that proclaimed that both personal fulfilment and social status would naturally accompany marriage and motherhood, was ignored by a number of Westmeath hunting women.²⁵³ A small number of women who shared gentry or similar status regularly rejected the 'separate spheres' of existence notion and did so with the support of the patriarchal figure in the family as hunting was regularly carried out in the company of a male family member.

Arguably, the template for the institution of the sports club at county level, was provided by the mechanisms adopted by Westmeath Hunt Club. The concept of the subscription club, as an organisational framework for sporting activity, was introduced to the county at the time of its establishment in 1854. A committee was responsible for the management of the club's affairs with the main administrative tasks the responsibility of the secretary and treasurer. Ancillary activities, chiefly the promotion of steeplechasing and the organisation of the hunt ball, added considerably to the sporting and social dimension of the club and provided a fulcrum about which the socialisation of the basic hunting activity was extended. To suggest that clubs that developed later to cater for other sporting disciplines were modelled on the hunt club prototype might be tenuous but certainly some element of modelling took place. Cricket and cycling clubs promoted athletic sports partly as a means of raising finance but also a means of establishing identity; end of season balls were important to clubs across the social classes. These developments paralleled hunting club ancillary

²⁵² John Lowerson, *Sport and the English middle classes, 1850-1914*, Manchester, 1993, 33.

²⁵³ Myrtle Hill, *Women in Ireland: a century of change*, Belfast, 2003, 21.

activities and were an important means of establishing profile and respectability. The standard for emulation was that of the Westmeath Hunt Club.

Finally, polo catered for a male minority of a minority group in society. The polo campus provided a haven for those whose proprietorial rights had been significantly diluted by the various land acts; their income similarly affected and their political power at the local and national level seriously eroded and perhaps most importantly in a sporting context, their ability to hunt unhindered across the fields of Westmeath was strongly challenged on occasions.

Chapter 2: Horseracing development, 1850-1905

Introduction

Racing in Westmeath had an established tradition by the mid-nineteenth century. The first recorded meeting was held at Athlone in early August 1731.¹ The earliest recorded meet for Mullingar occurred forty-six years later.² Kilbeggan races developed later and its first recorded event wasn't held until the 9 March 1840 and, despite the impact of the Famine, a meet was held there for each year of the 1840s.³

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the importance of racing in the county. The number of racing events will be quantified and the nature, organisation, management and funding of racing within the county during the second half of the nineteenth century will be examined. The initial strong links between steeplechasing and hunting will be emphasised but at the end of the century these had been significantly diluted. The main personnel involved will be identified and it will be shown that by the end of the century an identifiable Westmeath racing community had emerged that competed in racing events nationally. The framework for this analysis is based on in-depth case studies of two major but different race meets organised during distinctive eras of racing. The first will be of the Athlone gentry organised meet held between 1857-68 and the second will be of the commercially organised, limited company promoted meet at Mullingar between 1890-1905.⁴

Horseracing, with the notable exception of Fergus A. D'Arcy's excellent monograph, has remained outside the pale of Irish academic inspection.⁵ However a number of excellent narrative studies of events have been published which were important in identifying personalities and trends and establishing contexts.⁶ In the British context serious and extensive scholarly studies of the social and economic importance of flat

¹ Harman Murtagh, 'Horse-racing in Georgian Athlone', in *Journal of the old Athlone society*, ii, 6, 1985, 85.

² Fergus A. D'Arcy, *Horses, Lords & racing men: the Turf Club, 1790-1990*, The Curragh, 1991, 16.

³ Stan McCormack, *Against the odds, Kilbeggan races, 1840-1994*, np. 1994, 15-20.

⁴ Those who participated in the races were identified and databases were constructed and their place of residence, occupation and other details were analysed.

⁵ D'Arcy, *Horses*, This work examines the history of the Turf Club and its role in managing flat racing over a 200-year period.

⁶ Williams and Hyland, *Irish Derby* and by the same authors *Irish Grand National*. Colonel S. J. Watson, M.B.E., M.A., *Between the Flags: a history of Irish steeplechasing*, Dublin, 1969. John Welcome, *Irish horse racing, an illustrated history*, London, 1982.

racing have been undertaken.⁷ Questions raised in these works, as well as issues examined in the detailed thematic approach of John Tolson, are explored in this local study.⁸ Iris Maud Middleton has produced a model local study of horseracing that has inspired some of the approaches to analysis adopted in this chapter.⁹

General overview of Westmeath racing

A surprise finding of this study was the high number of racing meets that were organised from the 1850s. At least one meet was organised in Mullingar or its hinterland annually. Three distinct phases of racing were organised at Kilbeggan; initially between 1840-55, a second phase was held between 1879-85 and a revived meeting began in 1901.¹⁰ Racing was held over two periods in the Athlone district between 1857-1868 and between 1893-1905.¹¹ A meet was also staged at Moate beginning in 1889 but was abandoned by 1899.¹² Only Mullingar managed to hold more than one meeting yearly and by 1903 the Newbrook racecourse was holding three meetings annually. The five-year aggregate totals for Westmeath racing events is illustrated in Figure 6.

The close connections between hunting and steeplechasing meant that many of the race meets were organised by clubs such as the Westmeath Hunt Club, the South Westmeath Hunt Club or by an individual who possessed a pack of hounds. Members of the landed gentry with strong hunting associations organised small local meets at various venues. In March 1857, for example, on the lands of John Malone, near Ballymore, a three-event steeplechase meet was organised. The events were an open sweepstake, a welter stakes confined to horses regularly hunted with any identifiable pack of foxhounds in Ireland, and a selling stakes.¹³ Owners of private harriers also hosted small point-to-point or steeplechase meets. Cecil Fetherstonhaugh organised a two-event meet at Bracklyn in 1890 to cater for his hunting friends' entertainment and

⁷ Wray Vamplew, *The Turf: a social and economic history of horse racing*, London, 1976. Mike Huggins, *Flat racing and British society 1790-1914: a social and economic history*, London, 2000.

⁸ John Tolson, 'The Railways and Racing', unpublished PhD thesis, De Monfort University, Leicester, 1999.

⁹ Iris Maud Middleton, 'The developing pattern of horse racing in Yorkshire 1700-1749: an analysis of the people and the places', unpublished PhD thesis, De Monfort University, Leicester, 2000.

¹⁰ McCormack, *Against the odds*, 21-23; 25-37; 39.

¹¹ No race meets were held in Athlone in 1897 and 1904.

¹² *WE*, 16 March 1889.

¹³ *WG*, 26 Feb. 1857, 26 March 1867.

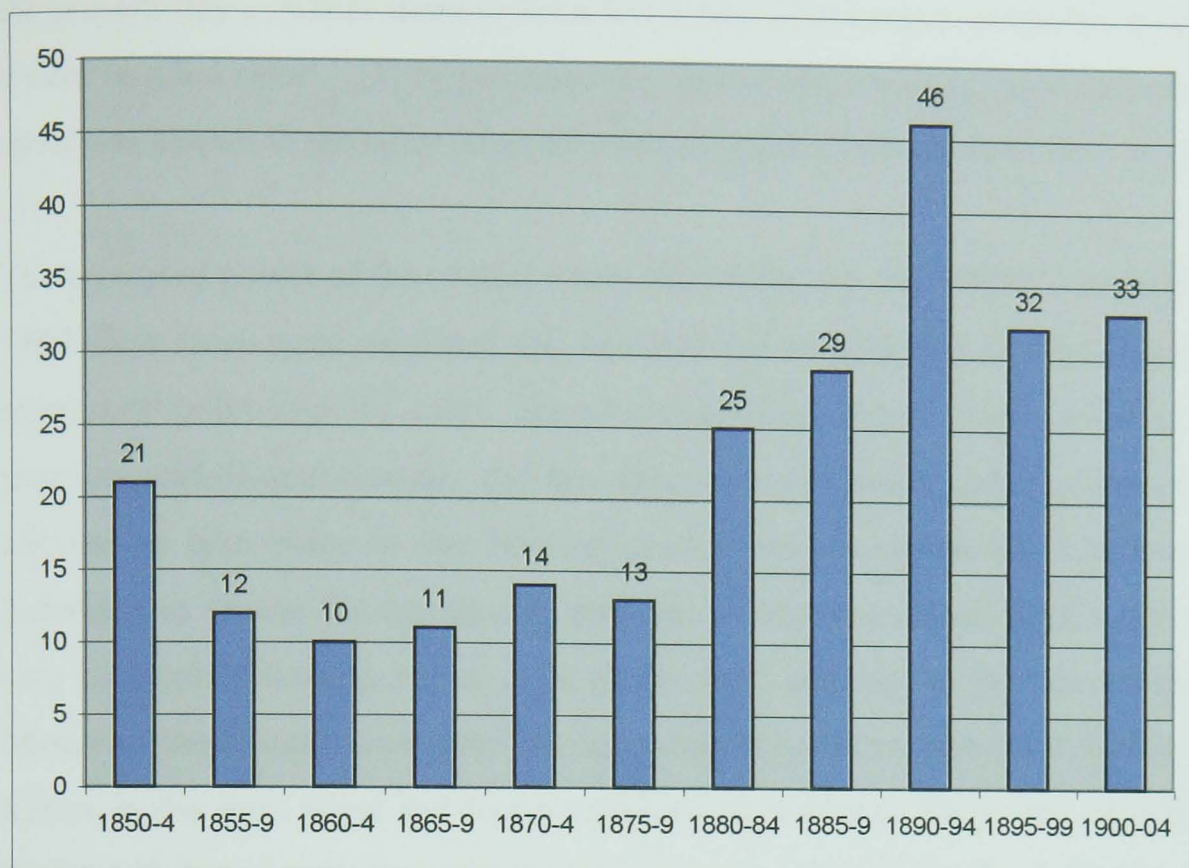


Figure 6: Frequency of race meetings organised in county Westmeath 1850-1904.

to recognise supportive farmers. The winner of each race was presented with one of ‘Whippy’s best hunting saddles’.¹⁴ Club meets typically consisted of four events, the most important of which were a welter and a lightweight race confined to *bona fide* hunters, the property of members of the hunt club or family associates. Links between the hunting and the military communities were recognised by including officers quartered at Mullingar, Athlone or Longford, and Westmeath based officers of the RIC, who had subscribed to the funds of the hunt, amongst those eligible to compete.¹⁵ The role played by farmers in facilitating hunting was acknowledged by the inclusion of two farmers’ races on a programme. In the 1890s, these races were included in the spring meet held at the Newbrook course, in Mullingar. The Westmeath Hunt Club also organised its own point-to-point meeting beginning in 1877.¹⁶ The South Westmeath Hunt Club also organised an annual point-to-point meet at various venues in its hunting district in the 1890s. The meets, in the words of J. R. Malone, were organised where possible ‘over a fine natural line of country calculated to test the merits of horse and man’ and not over the ‘so called steeplechase courses of

¹⁴ *WG*, 21 March 1890. The first event was confined to gentlemen who had hunted with the harriers during the previous season with the second event confined to farmers who had hunted with the harriers or whose lands had been ridden over.

¹⁵ *WG*, 21 March 1890.

¹⁶ Dease, *Westmeath hunt*, 89.

the present-day ...where there is not a fence that would test the capabilities of a good hunter or good rider'.¹⁷ They provided the opportunity to enjoy 'steeplechasing as the sport was known in the early days, divested of much of the modern innovations'.¹⁸

The increased power of the central controlling authority, the INHSC, was such that by 1890 these races were regulated and by 1900 the Irish *Racing Calendar* included six regulatory point-to-point rules. Steeplechase rules, except those relating to illicit practices and disqualification, did not apply to these meets and no other races were allowed to take place in the hunting country on the same day. Organisers were forbidden to charge for entrance to any part of the course and flags were permitted only to identify turning points. The meets were held under the stewardship of the Master of the Hounds and only one meet was allowed to each hunt club annually.¹⁹ Riders in the hunt races had to be members of the hunt, their sons or officers of a Westmeath based regiment that subscribed to the hunt.²⁰ Finally, between 1881 and 1904, the Westmeath polo club organised a five-event meet for its members at Ledeston.

An important aspect of the racing culture of the county, especially during the late 1880s-early 1890s, was the £4 19s. races. These races to a certain extent were a reaction against the centralising tendencies of the INHSC. First prize was limited, to avoid the control of the INHSC whose remit extended to races offering a first prize of £5. Many districts in Westmeath organised these meets as can be seen from Figure 7. They were normally managed by a local committee of gentry, farmers and business people and were easily arranged because of the low value prize-money. Finance was raised by subscription and a levy on carriages entering the course. The Multyfarnham races of 1893 for instance charged cars 2s. 6d. on entrance while four wheelers paid 5s. Those who subscribed 10s. to the race fund were admitted free. Other venues operated a similar system.²¹

¹⁷ *WG*, 4 April 1879.

¹⁸ *WG*, 22 April 1887.

¹⁹ Watson, *Between the flags*, 132-33.

²⁰ *WE*, 5 March 1904.

²¹ *WG*, 10 Feb. 1893, 7 April 1893 for Rathowen and Dalystown charges.

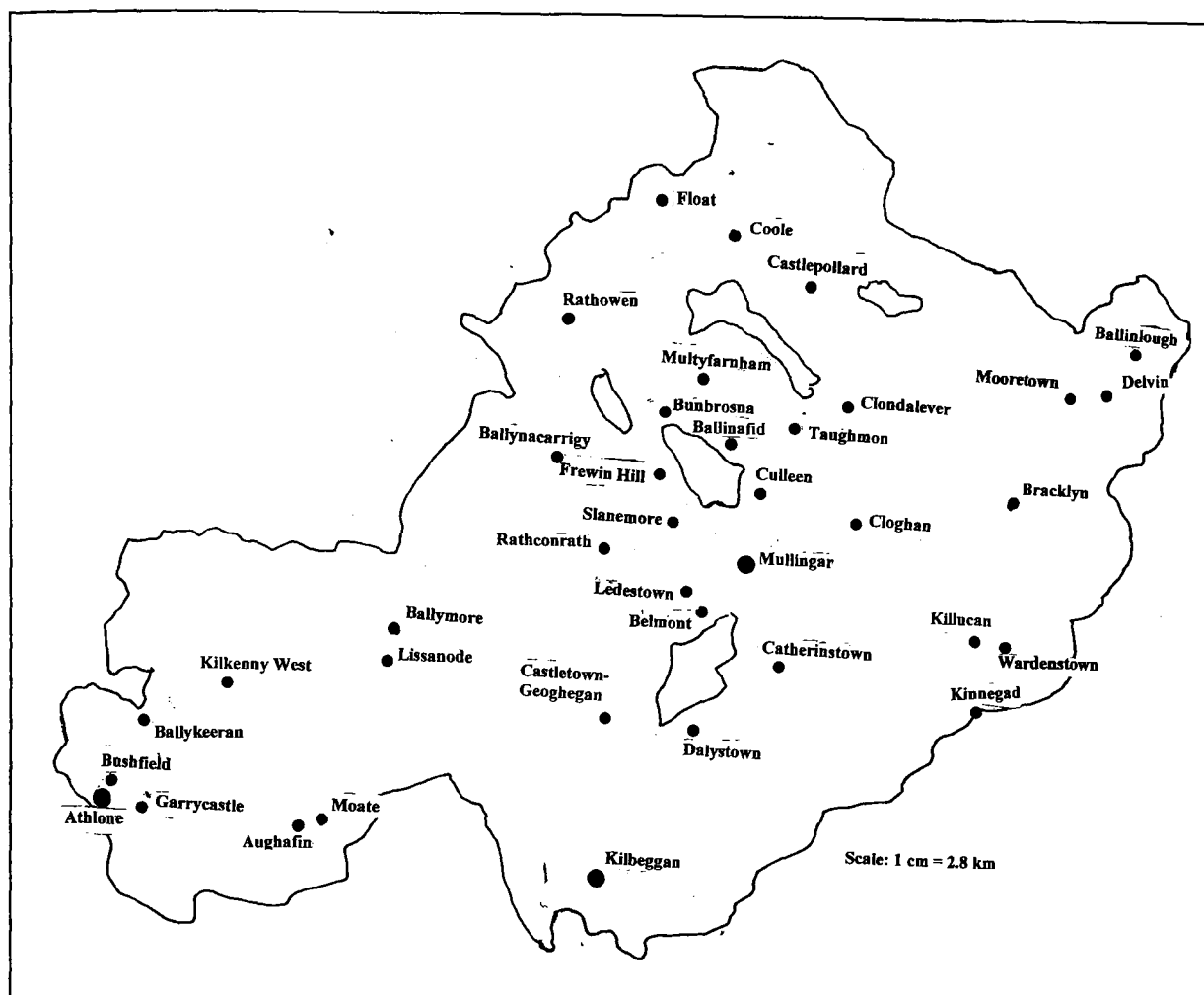


Figure 7: Venues where Westmeath race meetings were held, 1850-1905.

Difficulties with these races were identified by the *Westmeath Examiner* reporter's comments on the Moate races of 1890. He pointed out that

there are no rules to bind owners and riders of horses at meetings of this description except such as the stewards may frame, and no penalties to be inflicted for infringing the rules of justice and fair play ²²

In such an undisciplined environment incidents of 'gross injustices and scandalous misbehaviour of some of the participants' were normal.²³ Problems with this type of meet nationally forced the INHS committee to take action and in September 1893 the meets were declared illegal and from 1 January 1894 horses and riders that took part in these events were suspended.

According to Fergus Darcy, a bifurcation trend had emerged in Irish race meeting organisation by the end of the century, between commercial and professional park

²² *WE*, 12 April 1890.

²³ *Ibid.*

courses and the semi-professional local meets. The former were organised and run as limited companies whilst the latter were organised by alliances of enthusiastic local tradesmen, solicitors, doctors, and gentry who partly financed their meetings by subscriptions and door-to door collections.²⁴ These trends were strongly represented in Westmeath with the Kilbeggan and Athlone meets promoted by committees of enthusiastic locals, whilst the Mullingar meet from 1890 was promoted by a limited company established specifically for the purpose. This company's characteristics and its impact on racing will be examined in depth later in the chapter. It was possible to identify, using the 1901 census returns, thirty-three individuals who were active at committee level in organising and promoting the Athlone race meet between 1893 and 1900 and identify their professional and business status. The landowning classes were a minority and were represented by the aristocratic Lord Castlemaine and also included Longworth-Dames, land agent R. A. Handcock and two 'gentlemen farmers' F.W. Russell and E. Wakefield. The higher status professionals dominated the committees over the period and the categories represented included five doctors, four lawyers, three vets, a bank manager, a civil engineer and a newspaper editor. Businessmen formed the third category of committee representative and included two hoteliers, four general merchants, a timber merchant, three drapers, two publicans, a commercial traveller and a brewer's agent. The Athlone experience illustrates how the management and organisation at the local level was transformed during the course of the second half of the nineteenth century from an activity organised by landed elites for their own equestrian and social pleasures to one organised by the middle and professional classes but still frequented by representatives of the landed gentry or those professionally engaged in the sport.

Racing during this period was dominated by steeplechasing and the majority of meets were held in the months of March and April as the hunting season concluded. The number of days over which races were run was initially associated with their status in terms of aristocratic or gentry attendance, number of entries received and the prize money offered.²⁵ In Westmeath, only Mullingar and Athlone supported two-day meets

²⁴ D'Arcy, *Horses*, 213.

²⁵ Huggins, *Flat racing*, 32.

and these were abandoned in Athlone in 1866 and Mullingar in 1873, with racing thereafter confined to one-day events.²⁶

The type of race organised at a meet change considerably over the period of study. Steeplechases dominated a typical meet until the 1890s. Race meets held over the first two decades of this study were in all cases steeplechases and of 220 races held in Athlone and Mullingar between 1857 and 1875, 111 were raced over one or two mile heats. In post-1890 races, steeplechases were still dominant but other events were introduced and were growing in importance as can be seen in Table 10. The change is a reflection of the increased professionalisation of racing and indicative of the changing relationship between hunting and steeplechasing.

	Steepelechases	Hurdle races	Flat races
Mullingar (n=231)	177	34	20
Athlone (n=61)	36	5	20
Kilbeggan (n=25)	11	6	8
Percentage of total	70.66	14.20	15.14

Table 10: Type of race organised in Mullingar, Athlone and Kilbeggan, 1890-1905 (N = total number of races held).

Athlone Races 1857-1868

The purpose of this section is to analyse a transitional gentry organised and supported race meet by carrying out an in-depth analysis of an event held in the Athlone region between 1857-68. This was first held in 1857 when the resident landlord Thomas Naghten, hosted a meet at his Thomastown Park demesne.²⁷ This was transferred to the east of the Shannon to Garrycastle in 1858 where it survived until 1868.²⁸

This was a steeplechase meet, the most popular form of racing in Ireland at the time, a popularity based on its direct link with hunting. The two feature events were the Garrycastle Handicap and the Glynwood Hunt Challenge Cup, steeplechases raced over two circuits of the purpose built one and a half mile course. The main difference between the two was in the method chosen to equalise the competitors' chances of

²⁶ *WI*, 24 May 1866, *WG*, 28 May 1873.
²⁷ *Racing calendar*, 1858, 33-34. The Naghten estate was located in county Roscommon.
²⁸ *Racing calendar*, 1859, 83; *Racing calendar*, 1869, 63.

winning. The Garrycastle Handicap allocated weights to the horses on the basis of their previous public form or the stewards' awareness of it. Additional penalties were imposed for horses winning a race after the publication of the weights, the scale of the penalty based on the value of the race that was won.²⁹ This type of race appealed to the racing fraternity because of the element of betting uncertainty inherent in the category. Owners had the opportunity of landing a gambling coup because a horse carried a lighter weight after its form had been concealed in earlier races, and appealed to bookmakers because they could sometimes profit through their access to betting information about such horses.³⁰ The Glynwood Hunt Challenge Cup was a weight for age event, with the weight carried allocated on the base of the horse's age.³¹

Three other categories of races were also held. A race confined to farmers over whose land the Glynwood Harriers had hunted was organised on six occasions. Gentlemen farmers were excluded from these races and the inclusion of this type of race recognised the importance of the co-operation of the local farmer in facilitating the hunting activity of the south Westmeath gentry. Selling stakes were held on five occasions and were attractive to owners. There was the possibility of making money in a variety of ways such as selling the successful horse, an inferior horse in an inferior event could win prize money and by a careful manipulation of the odds and form a betting profit could be achieved.³² Three consolation races were held, an event as its title suggests, confined to runners who were unsuccessful at the meet. Organised by means of a sweepstake, with some prize-money added from the racing fund, consolation stakes encouraged owners to enter their horses in Athlone and presented them with an additional opportunity to win prize-money or land a gamble.

Races were normally decided over a number of heats. Only the Glynwood Cup, the Garrycastle Handicap and the 1860 Railway Plate was held as three-mile steeplechase events. On all other occasions events were decided normally by the first horse to win

²⁹ The 1866 race, for instance, placed an additional penalty of seven pounds on a horse winning a race valued at £50 and a fourteen-pound penalty on a horse winning a race of value in excess of £100.

³⁰ Huggins, *Flat racing*, 35.

³¹ *WG*, 28 April 1864. In 1864, for example, three year old horses carried nine stone weight, four year-olds ten stones ten pounds, five year olds eleven stone four pounds and horses aged six and upwards carried eleven stone seven pounds.

³² Huggins, *Flat racing*, 35.

two heats of a one and a half-mile race. Horses that finished more than a distance behind the winner in a heat were eliminated and up to a half-hour was allowed between heats for recovery. This type of event was attractive to both meet organiser and horse owner. The former was able to present an afternoon's racing using a small pool of horses. The requirement that horses had to race possibly four times before the winner was decided reduced the financial pressures on the meet patron. Owners who raced horse in these events also enjoyed benefits. An owner who had entered for an event decided over a series of heats had more than one opportunity of victory or landing a gamble. The opportunity for landing a coup on one's horse was trebled or quadrupled in some cases.

The Garrycastle meet was primarily the work of one individual. The principal figure associated with the races was John Longworth, who inherited the Glynwood estate of 3,264 acres, 964 of which formed the private demesne, in 1854.³³ Longworth became involved in race promotion because of his hunting profile. As the master of the Glynwood Hounds he was one of the most important hunting personalities in the Irish midlands.³⁴ The Garrycastle races were, in essence, an event organised by a wealthy benefactor for the entertainment of his hunting colleagues. Longworth provided the course for the meet and invested in improving the course and facilities. Adjustments made to the natural terrain of the course reduced its degree of difficulty and provided a safer racing environment for horse and rider. In 1863, six stonewalls were removed and replaced with sunk and raised fences. Despite the intervention 'severe falls occurred during the running of the event'.³⁵ Spectating facilities were also improved. A stand house was constructed and later extended, a telegraph room erected and separate refreshment, stewards and jockey rooms provided.³⁶ Longworth also sponsored the two feature events of the meet, the Glynwood Hunt Challenge Cup valued at 100 sovereigns with fifty sovereigns added in specie and the Garrycastle Handicap with 100 sovereigns added by Mr Longworth.³⁷ The former event was confined to horses that had hunted with the Glynwood hounds at least four times over the previous season. In 1865, in an attempt to encourage more owners to send their

³³ Jeremiah Sheehan, *South Westmeath, farm and folk*, Dublin, 1978, 48-52. Twenty years later he owned an estate of 13,432 acres that provided him with an estimated annual rental of £9,000.

³⁴ Sheehan, *South Westmeath*, 206.

³⁵ *WI*, 25 April 1863, *Irish Times*, 22 April 1863.

³⁶ *WI*, 31 March 1860.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

hunters to Athlone the event was opened to all horses hunted at least six times with any established pack of hounds in Ireland.³⁸

The source of the prize-money

Analysis of the returns from the Irish *Racing Calendar* makes it possible to quantify the source of the prize-money paid out at the Athlone meets. The information is presented in Table 11 and it emphasises the importance of sweepstake contributions to the fund. Ultimately, the Garrycastle race meeting was one in which wealthy individuals raced for prize-money, the majority of which was supplied by themselves. Owners who competed or intended to compete subscribed a significant portion of the prize-money. Sweepstake contributions formed almost 28 per cent of the total prize-money of 3,563. 10s. From its inception in 1857 to the final meet in 1868, sixty-five different races were held at the Thomastown and the Garrycastle venues. The majority of these were sweepstakes or combined a sweepstake contribution with some element of private patronage. Even the liberally funded Garrycastle Handicap and the Glynwood Hunt Challenge Cup regularly included a sweepstake of five sovereigns per person. This method was a simple system of ensuring a reasonable prize without each competitor having to subscribe a prohibitively large amount. It also created self-financed races without the patron or meet organisers having to provide the funding.

Not all those who entered horses presented themselves on the day of the event. Forfeits were payable in some cases to prevent this occurrence but did not always act as a deterrent. Handicap races were likely to experience the withdrawal phenomenon more than other events as owners, having examined the allotted weights decided that the chance of a win was minimal, decided to withdraw. The 1865 version of the Garrycastle Handicap had twelve subscribers but only eight runners, in 1866 nine subscribed but only six ran, twelve subscribed to a race that featured only four runners in 1867 and in the final running of the event fourteen subscribed to boost the prize fund of the five who ran on the day.³⁹

³⁸ *Racing calendar*, 1866, 40.

³⁹ *Racing calendar*, 1865, 50; *Ibid*, 1866, 78-9; *Ibid*, 1867, 86; *Ibid*, 1868, 64.

	Stewards	Sweepstake	Gentry Subs.	Railway Contribution	Unspecified	Athlone traders
1857	60	28	-	-	10	-
1858	-	49	-	-	60	25
1859	35	86	-	20	115	30
1860	-	119.10s.	100	20	120	50
1861	10	85	100	20	155	50
1862	30	90	120	20	75	40
1863	10	140	100	20	75	40
1864	10	51	100	20	110	40
1865	10	126	100	20	75	40
1866	20	56	80	20	40	-
1867	20	86	110	20	40	-
1868	20	72	110	20	40	-
Total	225	988.10s.	920	200	915	315

Source: Racing Calendar, 1857-68.

Table 11: Source of prize-money, Athlone races, 1857-68.

Gentry patronage was next in importance, accounting for 26 per cent of the total. John Longworth subscribed £840 of the £920 total in this category. In 1862, Sir Charles Dunville presented twenty sovereigns for the running of the Moyvannon Stakes.⁴⁰ In 1867 and 1868, the Shinglass Stakes were held, financed by John Malone who presented thirty sovereigns to the event. The final form of gentry patronage identified was the contribution made by the stewards to certain events. The initial Thomastown meet of 1857 featured races with contributions of sixty sovereigns by the stewards.⁴¹ The unspecified category includes money described as ‘added’ in the race articles without specifying whether it was provided by the stewards or as was more likely sourced from the race funds.

Commercial sponsorship by the Athlone town traders who were likely to benefit from the organisation of the races and from the directors of the MGWR provided 14.45 per cent of the total. The MGWR first became involved in 1859 and its twenty sovereign sponsorship was conditional on an added contribution of ten sovereigns by the stewards, support that had increased to twenty sovereigns by 1866.⁴² The railway company were obviously interested in carrying large numbers of spectators and transporting horses to the event and therefore insisted on the stewards boosting the

⁴⁰ *WI*, 26 April 1862.

⁴¹ *Racing calendar*, 1858, 33.

⁴² *Racing calendar* 1859, 66; *Ibid*, 1867, 77.

prize-money for their event by donating to the company race. Ultimately it was the failure of the commercial sector in Athlone to continue their subscriptions after 1865 that precipitated Longworth's decision to abandon the meet after 1868.

The race fund was created from the subscriptions of owners who raced horses at the meet. The basic subscription was the payment of an entry fee determined by the size of the first prize. The Garrycastle Handicap required a five sovereign entry fee with a three sovereign forfeit at the time of entrance. This event also required each person at the time of naming an entrant to pay two sovereigns to the race fund.⁴³ These stipulations encouraged those who had entered horses to present them at the day of the meet. The winning owner was also responsible for a contribution to the race fund. The high value races demanded the highest donation. The Garrycastle Handicap winner in 1862 was required to pay eight sovereigns and the Glynwood Hunt Challenge Cup winner paid six sovereigns.⁴⁴ At this time there were no second prizes for owners of second place horses. The best a second place owner could hope for was to have his stake fee refunded.⁴⁵ Selling races also provided a means of financing the race fund. In these races, the winning horse was auctioned immediately after the race for a pre-determined minimum sum. Any price raised above the stipulated minimum was donated to the racing fund. In 1864, for example, Mr. G. Coote's Maude was entered for the Railway Plate at a proposed selling price for £30 but having won the race impressively was auctioned for £50. The surplus of £20 was paid to the race fund.⁴⁶

Participation

Analysis of the races held between 1857-68 establishes that 118 individuals were responsible for the 275 different entries made over the period. The frequency with which they participated is illustrated in Table 12.

⁴³ *WI*, 29 March 1862,

⁴⁴ *WI*, 26 April 1862.

⁴⁵ *WI*, 31 March 1860.

⁴⁶ *WG*, 28 April 1864.

Frequency of participation	Westmeath residents	Outside the county residents	Unidentified residence
1	7	29	34
2	1	14	7
3	1	11	2
4	-	2	-
5	-	1	-
6	-	2	-
7	-	2	-
9	-	1	-
12	-	1	-
15	-	1	-
16	1	-	-
35	-	1	-

Source: *Westmeath Guardian* 1857-68.

Table 12: Frequency of participation in Athlone races 1857-68.

The place of residence for seventy-five (63.55 per cent) of these owners has been identified. Owners from fourteen different counties were represented at the meet, with the majority coming from the west and northwest of Ireland. Geographical location was a major factor in determining participation, as owners from Galway, Roscommon and Westmeath were by far the most active at the races.⁴⁷ The size of the race purse was also important, as a number of owners who entered horses on a single occasion, did so in one of the two feature events. John Lanigan, an MP for Cashel, county Tipperary, brought his horse National Petition from Templemore, county Tipperary, to win the Garrycastle Handicap on the only occasion he competed at Athlone in 1865. Earlier in the week he had been a winner at Punchestown.⁴⁸ In 1860, the Marquis of Drogheda was successful in the same race on his only occasion to enter a horse at the meet, as was Mr Bell from Newbridge, county Kildare, in 1866 on only his second occasion to race horses at the venue.⁴⁹

The comprehensive railway links to Athlone enabled these owners from outside the immediate district to access the meet. Of these Mr O’Ryan from Cahir, county Tipperary, with six appearances, attended most often. Little Tiney was his favoured horse for the Athlone meet and was entered four times that included one victory in the

⁴⁷ Sixteen owners from Galway and the same from Roscommon raced horses at Garrycastle.

⁴⁸ RV Comerford, ‘Tipperary representatives at Westminster, 1801-1918’, in William. Nolan (ed), *Tipperary: history and society, interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county*, Dublin, 1985, 331. *Irish Times*, 17 May 1865.

⁴⁹ *Irish Times*, 23 May 1866.

Garrycastle Handicap in 1859. The previous year this hunter was raced in Tipperary, Athlone, Carrick-on-Suir, Dungarvan and Armagh winning almost 200 sovereigns in the process.⁵⁰ Personal contact was likely to have been a factor in attracting O’Ryan to Garrycastle as Longworth’s hunting network extended to Tipperary where he ‘paid an annual visit to Roscrea for a week or ten days’.⁵¹

The confined nature of some of the races ensured that a significant proportion (24.57 per cent) of the owners were locally based. The Glynwood Hunt Challenge Cup, was until 1865, confined to members who hunted with the Longworth hounds, for a specified number of occasions, during the hunting season. Twenty members of the Longworth hunt competed in Athlone as well as nine local farmers over whose lands the hounds were hunted. The majority of the owners with unidentified places of residence entered only one race at Garrycastle, and of these six were army officers, probably members of the Athlone based garrison, and six entered the farmers’ race. These individuals were unlikely to have been regular racing men and may have entered a race at their local meet for the pleasure and excitement of competing and for the opportunity it gave them to experience a social world from which they were normally excluded.

The two most active owners at Garrycastle owned demesnes located within ten miles of the venue, and were immersed in the hunting-steeplechasing culture that was central to the lifestyle of some landed gentry.⁵² The most important was J. M. Naghten from Thomastown demesne located to the west of Athlone, where he owned 4,829 acres of land, the income from which provided the capital for the support of his racing and hunting stable.⁵³ Naghten was a member of an elite group of the landed gentry who maintained a quality racing stable and also supported his own pack of hounds. In association with Longworth, he initiated and hosted the meet, at his Thomastown demesne in 1857. He was the chief supporter of the meet, entering horses on thirty-five separate occasions. His stable at this time included a number of quality steeplechasers that were regularly raced throughout the country. In 1857, his horse Kate was raced at Ballymore (county Westmeath), at Thomastown, Elphin,

⁵⁰ *Racing calendar*, 1858, 307.

⁵¹ Dease, *Westmeath hunt*, 57.

⁵² Dooley, *Big house*, 59-61

⁵³ *Return of land owners*, 318.

Galway, Turrock, and Roscommon winning 152 sovereigns in total. Mr Naghten also used the horse in two match races with the Tipperary owner Mr O’Ryan.⁵⁴ In 1859, two of his horses Thomastown and Blind Hookey won 237 and 159 sovereigns respectively at venues such as Tullamore, Punchestown, Skerries, Fairyhouse, Kingstown, Carrickmacross, Ardee and Kilcock.⁵⁵ Naghten enjoyed his most successful year in 1860 when Nanny O’Leary in ten appearances on racetracks won 212 sovereigns and Thomastown scored two significant wins from her eight racing appointments. At the Howth and Baldoyle Great Municipal Steeplechase, Thomastown was a winner of 148 sovereigns and topped this in the Kildare Hunt Steeplechase with a win of 300 sovereigns. In total, Naghten won 686 sovereigns in 1860.⁵⁶ Naghten’s lack of success in the later 1860s illustrates the difficulty owners faced in attempting to turn out winners on a consistent basis. In the years between 1864-68 his total earnings amounted to 288 sovereigns having failed to earn any prize-money in 1865 and 1866.

John Malone was one of the leading landowners in county Westmeath where he possessed 12,544 acres of land in 1874.⁵⁷ His sixteen runners made him the second most prolific racer of horses at Athlone. Malone was heavily involved in the world of hunting and was a leading figure in the Westmeath Hunt Club. He was the most successful owner to have competed at Garrycastle winning on eight occasions including four times in the prestigious Glynwood Hunt Challenge Cup. He also competed nationally, winning 214 sovereigns with Nannie, in 1859, at Mullingar, Athlone, Athenry, Galway and Roscommon.⁵⁸ Next in importance was the Ballinasloe based Denis Colohan who raced horses on fifteen occasions. The Colohans were a property owning Galway family, resident at Ballinasloe, with strong associations with the medical profession.⁵⁹ Christopher Ussher, sent horses to Athlone on nine occasions between 1858-61 and in that time was twice successful in the major events of the meet winning the Glynwood Hunt Challenge Cup and the Garrycastle

⁵⁴ *Racing calendar*, 1857, 8, 34, 47, 55, 71, 125, 127-8, 290.

⁵⁵ *Racing calendar*, 1860, 240, 245.

⁵⁶ *Racing calendar*, 1860, 272, 284, 288.

⁵⁷ *Return of land owners*, 304.

⁵⁸ *Racing calendar*, 1860, 259.

⁵⁹ Diarmuid O’Cearbhaill, ‘The Colohans – a remarkable Galway family’, in *Journal of the Galway archaeological and historical association*, 54, 2002, 121-126.

Handicap. Ussher's land base was at Eastwell, Kinrinckle, county Galway, where he owned 3,666 acres of land with a rateable valuation of £1,781.⁶⁰

Lord De Freyne was the most active aristocrat at the Athlone meet. He raced horses on six occasions, and except on one occasion, concentrated on the major events. De Freyne was one of the largest landowners in the country, and possessed an estate of 34,400 acres valued at £13,584, at Frenchpark, county Roscommon, in addition to 4,052 acres in Sligo and 328 in Galway.⁶¹ He was a Protestant clergyman who 'kept race-horses from his boyhood', and reportedly attended every important race meeting. He worked to improve the breed of horses in Ireland by importing good sires from England and at his death he owned almost seventy horses and maintained his own pack of hounds.⁶²

Decline of the meet

The Garrycastle meeting was ended in 1868 with the later years characterised by low levels of support. Contemporary newspapers suggested various reasons for this predicament. In 1862, the *Westmeath Independent* reported that 'the number of horses starting was very much below what might be expected'.⁶³ Four of the six events attracted only three entrants and in two of these races, Thomas Naghten's Nannie O'Leary, faced the starter twice on the same day, running five heats over a distance of seven and a half-miles. In 1864, the scarcity of horses was attributed to the almost total cessation within 'the last few years' of breeding hunters and the proximity to the Punchestown meet.⁶⁴ The 1865 meet clashed with the opening of the Great Exhibition in Dublin.⁶⁵ One-day racing was introduced in 1866, but the clash with the Ardee meet impacted 'both as regards the attendance of sporting men and the number of horses starting'. In three of the races only three runners contested each race.⁶⁶ The Ardee meet in contrast was considered to be 'the most brilliant' meet held at the venue with 'the fields in each race very large' and 'sharp contests were the order of

⁶⁰ *Returns of land owners*, 300. Ussher also competed nationally and was a member of the original regulatory committee of the Irish National Hunt Steeplechasing Committee.

⁶¹ Hussey de Burgh, *The great landowners of Great Britain and Ireland*, London, 1883, 124; *Return of landowners of Ireland*, Baltimore, 1988, 295, 320.

⁶² Fitzpatrick, *Irish sport*, 205-7.

⁶³ *WI*, 26 April 1862.

⁶⁴ *WI*, 30 April 1864.

⁶⁵ *WI*, 11 May 1865; *Irish Times*, 10 May 1865.

⁶⁶ *WI*, 24 May 1866.

the day’.⁶⁷ The 1867 event suffered from a shared date with the Derby, which reduced ‘speculation in the different events, the absence of nearly all the professionals in Surrey being a sufficient cause’.⁶⁸ Table 13 illustrates the number of horses that raced in the sixty-five races held between 1857-68 and illustrates the extent to which small fields were a feature of this local meet as in 71 per cent of the races five horses or less competed.

Number of horses per race	2-3	4-5	6-7	8-9	10-11
Number of races	20	26	13	4	2

Table 13: Distribution of horses taking part in Athlone race meet 1857-68.

The Athlone experience was part of a broader trend of decline experienced nationally between 1862-4. However this was confined to the early 1860s and the situation changed sharply in the later 1860s as the number of races held, horses raced and available prize-money increased as illustrated in Appendix 3.

It has been suggested that violence at the meet was responsible for bringing the meet to an end.⁶⁹ This wasn’t a peculiarly local or indeed Irish phenomenon. Vamplew has pointed out that almost any event in Victorian England where large groups of people gathered could result in crowd disorder and in particular spectators frequently got out of control at mid-Victorian race meets.⁷⁰ According to the reminiscences of a special contributor, published in the *Westmeath Guardian*, in May 1899, violence at the Garrycastle meet in 1868 resulted in Longworth banning racing from his course. According to this account the final meet ‘was disgraced by a faction fight of more than ordinary fierceness which is alleged to have resulted in several deaths’. An army officer from Athlone died from injuries received from a riding accident at the water jump, the peasants ‘brutally assaulted a jockey who was riding to the winning post’ and in one race the ‘whole field dashed wildly through the spectators, occasioning a

⁶⁷ *The Freeman’s Journal*, 23 May 1866.
⁶⁸ *WI*, 25 May 1867.
⁶⁹ *WI*, 13 May 1899.
⁷⁰ Wray Vamplew, *Pay up and play the game, professional sport in Britain, 1875-1914*, Cambridge, 1988, 266. See D’Arcy, *Horses*, for incidents of violence at Newcastle, county Limerick race meets in 1867 that led to the abandonment of the meet, 191-2.

number of accidents'.⁷¹ None of these incidents was peculiar to Garrycastle, as spectator control was a problem in all un-enclosed courses and the racecourse provided a convenient meeting place for factions to conduct their ritualised violent affrays. These incidents, the contributor incorrectly believed, forced the patron John Longworth to abandon racing at Garrycastle.

Inadequate financial resources were the main factor in the meets decline and in particular the ending of commercial support after 1866 when the Athlone traders ceased to contribute, convinced John Longworth that the time had arrived to abandon the event. The Ardee meeting of 1866 mentioned above provides a clear illustration of the extent to which the Garrycastle meet was financially disadvantaged. Excluding sweepstake money, this two-day event offered prize-money of 420 sovereigns at a time when Garrycastle offered 160 sovereigns.⁷² After the final meet, the *Irish Times* commented on the decline of the races from 'one of our crack meets' to what was 'merely the semblance of one' in 1868. This was due to the 'diminution in the sums added' and recommended that 'the sooner the gentry of Westmeath put their heads together and exert themselves towards improving matters, the better for the credit of the county'.⁷³ The Westmeath gentry men never put their heads together as their recreational world was focused towards the east of the county.

The Garrycastle meet was a transitional one, positioned between the commercially driven centrally regulated events of the later decades of the century and the unregulated pounding cross-country steeplechase matches of the early decades. As an event, it was closer in spirit to the tenets of modern sports organisation than the early nineteenth century events. The development of a purpose-built racecourse with consideration for the safety of horse and rider and the construction of accommodation for spectator comfort are indicative of a growing modernisation. The races were part of what was a national circuit for some owners but in which each event operated independently and free of any influence by a controlling authority. They depended on the local owners for their main support but they also attracted support from outside the immediate locality. The local stewards independently organised the management

⁷¹ *WI*, 13 May 1899.

⁷² *The Freeman's Journal*, 23 May 1866.

⁷³ *Irish Times*, 30 April 1868.

of the races. This freedom was about to change and two of the major processes that characterise the development of Victorian sport, codification and the establishment of a national controlling authority, transformed the nature and management of steeplechase racing in the final quarter of the century.

Codification prior to commercialisation

Henry Moore, the third Marquis of Drogheda, was the key person in the formulation of a code of rules for steeplechase racing which he ‘published as a comprehensive canon’ in the *Irish Racing Calendar* in 1866. He was also the central figure in the formation of the INHSC, in 1870, as the controlling body for that branch of the sport in Ireland.⁷⁴ The Turf Club was established in the 1780s but in the first century of its existence its claim to any kind of authority outside the Curragh district was essentially permissive.⁷⁵ Its powers were incrementally increased from the 1830s, which changed its role from one that exercised informal influence to that of positive control.⁷⁶ In 1835, publication of the *Racing Calendar* was brought under Turf Club control and it was published monthly. This strengthened the link between the club and local organisers and provided reliable information to local stewards that allowed for more accurate handicapping.⁷⁷ According to D’Arcy ‘the decisive occasion when the Turf Club assumed the role of general law-giver’ was the first meeting held under the chairmanship of the Marquis of Drogheda in October 1866. This was the occasion of a major revision of the rules of racing. In particular, rule 42 extended the power of the Turf Club stewards nationally. It decreed that a suspension sentence passed upon a jockey could not be remitted by the local stewards without the authority of a steward of the Turf Club. In the following two years this control was extended to include other racing personnel and was solidified with the extension of the licensing system for riders, trainers and officials.⁷⁸ In 1891 the ‘Turf Club’s bid for power’ was completed when the rule that required all racecourses to be licensed and all meetings sanctioned by the stewards of the Turf Club, was passed.⁷⁹ This legislation brought fixtures and their management under the authority of the Turf club: in the last quarter of the

⁷⁴ D’Arcy, *Horses*, 176.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 1.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 181.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 182. The necessity to have races published in the *Racing Calendar* was also used to increase the authority of the Turf Club.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 183-4.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 184-5.

nineteenth century the organisation's control over trainers, jockeys and its own officials including starters, judges, clerks of the scales, clerks of courses and handicappers was extended.⁸⁰

The above measures applied to flat racing but control of steeplechasing was also centralised. The publication in London of the first *Steeple Chase Calendar* in 1845 was a notable landmark in that it assembled in print the first suggested 'Rules of Steeple Chasing'. These suggested rules 'constituted a firm base for all subsequent regulations for steeplechasing in both England and Ireland'.⁸¹ These suggestions had little practical impact but formed an important basis for discussion when the next attempt was made to lay down rules governing all steeplechases. This was inspired by a leading article contained in *Bell's Life in London* published on 23 November 1862. This publication inspired debate that resulted in the publication of seventeen regulatory steeplechasing articles as an appendix to Weatherby's *Racing Calendar* of 1863.⁸² A National Hunt Committee was established in England in 1866.⁸³

Members of the Irish Turf Club took a close interest in the evolution of rules for steeplechasing in England. The Marquis of Drogheda played the leading role in adapting the English regulations to Irish conditions. He inspired the publication of the 'Grand National Steeple-Chase Rules 1864' in the *Irish Racing Calendar*. These were based and inspired by developments in England, where the steeplechasing branch of the sport had a reputation for dubious honesty and irregular conduct.⁸⁴ The rules were identical to the English ones with two exceptions where changes were made for local conditions.⁸⁵ These were little more than guidelines for local stewards as there was no controlling body to enforce them. Drogheda used his authority to progress matters further and in 1869 he formulated proposals for the setting up of the Irish National Hunt Steeplechasing Committee. Seventeen gentlemen prominently involved in the

⁸⁰ Ibid, 186-7.

⁸¹ Watson, *Between the flags*, 58-9. The *Steeple Chase Calendar* was dedicated to one of the most important figures in Irish hunting and steeplechasing, the Marquis of Waterford. As well as the suggested rules and regulations the volume also recorded results of all steeplechases run in England since 1826 and in Ireland since 1842.

⁸² Ibid, 68-69. The regulations embodied, with one exception, the ten rules published in Wright's *Steeple Chase Calendar* of 1845.

⁸³ R. Munting, *Hedges and hurdles, a social and economic history of national hunt racing*, London, 1987, 22.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 33.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 72

sport were nominated by him as the first committee and were accepted as such by the Turf Club stewards. The first meeting of the new organisation was held in 1870 and its relationship with the Turf Club was regularised with the appointment of the Keeper of the Match Book, R. J. Hunter as secretary of the new organisation.⁸⁶ The codification of the sport that followed can be quantified by examining the rules and regulations published in the *Racing Calendar*. In 1866 the canon of regulations included seventy-three rules, by 1877, the number had increased to 160, to 184 by 1894, which remained the situation until 1905.⁸⁷ The Turf Club and the INHSC had moved from a permissive to a prohibitive control over Irish racing between the 1860s and 1890s.⁸⁸

The commercial era, 1890-1905

The role of the limited company as a vehicle for promoting sport has received little attention in Irish historiography. Fergus D'Arcy makes reference to the importance of the limited company in Irish racing towards the end of the 1890s but any attempt to identify or analyse the companies involved was outside his terms of reference.⁸⁹ Irish publicly owned companies were of limited importance in the management of sport. At least three football clubs, Cliftonville in 1889, Belfast Celtic in 1901 and Glentoran in 1902 were launched as limited liability companies. In Belfast also, the Ulster Cricket Club was floated in 1898 in order to raise money for a new ground. Apart from Neal Garnham's football analysis, the social profile and motivation of individual shareholders who invested in Irish sport has received little attention.⁹⁰

In contrast, the motivation of those who invested in limited companies, as a means of promoting British sport, has received considerable scrutiny by economists. Some analysts have regarded the desire to profit from the growth in spectator interest as the primary motive for investment. Walvin suggests that those who invested in sports stadia were those who realised that there was 'money to be made by providing the right kind of leisure facilities'.⁹¹ Charles Korr's examination of the West Ham

⁸⁶ Welcome, *Irish horse racing*, 46-7.

⁸⁷ *Racing calendar*, 1866, lxiv-lxxxv; Ibid, 1877, lxxxi-cxxii; Ibid, 1894, lxxxv-cxix; Ibid, 1905, cix-cxvi.

⁸⁸ D'Arcy, *Horses*, 206.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 213.

⁹⁰ Garnham, *Association football*, 53-61.

⁹¹ James Walvin, *Leisure and society, 1830-1950*, London, 1978, 68.

football club reveals the importance of the profit motive behind developments.⁹² Other and more empirically based analyses suggest that the desire for personal monetary gain was not a primary consideration. Wray Vamplew's and Tony Mason's examination of the nature of shareholders, and their assessment of the management of football clubs activities, concluded that personal financial gain was unimportant and that surplus income was channelled into ground improvements and producing successful teams.⁹³

The directors and shareholders of the Westmeath (Mullingar) Race Company Limited replicated the management and investment practices of the football club directors. The company was launched in early 1890 with a share-capital target of £2,500 to be raised by the issue of £1.00 shares. The objectives of the company were outlined in the published prospectus. The company aimed to 're-establish the famous old racecourse at Newbrook, near Mullingar', and promote steeplechasing and flat racing. Promoting activities such as athletic sports, cricket, and 'other amusements' as well as 'agricultural, horse and other shows', and the organisation of sales for horses and stock in or near the town of Mullingar were other potential revenue generating possibilities outlined. Stud and other farming on the lands of Newbrook were also suggested as commercial possibilities. The proposed new company had obtained the tenant's interest in the land that formed the chief venue for Westmeath racing since 1852.⁹⁴

The seven-man board of directors, who held shares of a minimum value of £25 each, consisted of significant landed and business interests of the town and its hinterland.⁹⁵ Lord Greville, residing at Clonhugh, Mullingar was company chairman. Greville was the proprietor of the town of Mullingar and held extensive landed interest in the county as well as in Roscommon, Cavan, Cork, Longford and Kent.⁹⁶ The board also included three gentlemen who were the proprietors of substantial landed estates in the

⁹² Charles P. Korr, 'West Ham United Football Club and the beginnings of professional football in east London, 1895-1914, in *Journal of Contemporary History*, 13, 2, 178, 211-32.

⁹³ Mason, *Association football*, 37-49; Vamplew, *Pay up*, 77-87; also Vamplew, 'The economics of a sports industry: Scottish gate-money football, 1890-1914', in *Economic History Review*, 35, 4, 1982, 549-67.

⁹⁴ *WE*, 1 Feb. 1890.

⁹⁵ *WG*, 9 Jan. 1891.

⁹⁶ Bateman, *Great landowners*, 195. The 1876 return of owners of land in Britain and Ireland recorded Greville as the owner of 9,783 acres in Westmeath.

county; Capt Ralph Smith, Gaybrook, Mullingar owned of 6,287 acres; Colonel J. R. Malone, Rath, Ballynacargy, possessed 12,554 acres and Captain Cecil Fetherstonhaugh, Bracklyn, Killucan controlled 4,711 acres. Commercial interests on the board were represented by John W. Gordon proprietor of Mullingar's leading drapery store; Christopher Downes, a Mullingar based lawyer, Joseph P Dowdall, a Dominick Street leather dealer and seed merchant and Owen O' Sullivan, a publican and proprietor of one of Mullingar's most important horse repositories. The final director was Eugene Salmon, a landowner with a history of involvement in field sports. Salmon farmed three areas of land of 121 acres, 65 acres and 69 acres in extent with a combined valuation of £182. 10s.⁹⁷ Involvement in hunting and steeplechasing was the bond of commonality that bound these men together. Greville, at the time the company was formed, was MFH in Westmeath. Malone, Fetherstonhaugh and Smith were key figures in the hunting community, Downes, Gordon and Dowdall had significant business dealings with that particular community and O'Sullivan, as a proprietor of a horse repository, conducted substantial business with hunting folk.

The buoyancy of the Mullingar economy, the status and influence of the board of directors and the desire to have a regular race meeting in the town was such that 350 oversubscribed the share issue. Unfortunately the original list of shareholders hasn't survived but according to the *Westmeath Examiner* the list was representative of all classes: the principal shareholders belonged to the town with 'many of the shopkeepers acting most generously in the number of shares subscribed for [sic]', a development that was likely to 'enhance the trade of the town to a considerable extent'.⁹⁸

Directors and shareholders identified from newspaper reports of the company's annual general meeting are listed in Appendix 4 as well as the nature of their business. Unfortunately, the value of shareholding held by each is not identifiable, so that no conclusions can be made on the proportion of shares held by the different social groups. Of the forty-one shareholders identified all except one were local residents. Aristocratic and gentry involvement in addition to the directors included Sir Walter

⁹⁷ VO, Valuation lists; county of Westmeath, district of Delvin, Electoral division of Killulagh, 1860-1936. Valuation list number 15, 1884-1898 revision, 15 (Gigginstown); .27 (Rickardstown).

⁹⁸ *WE*, 15 Feb. 1890

Nugent, a second member of the Fetherstonhaugh family, Percy O'Reilly, who was also a director of the MGWR in the 1890s and E. T. F. Briscoe. The remainder of the shareholders were drawn from the business and professional classes of the town. The group included a number of doctors, lawyers, six grocery and spirit dealers whose business might be expected to benefit from the crowds drawn to the town for the race meets, as well as the proprietors of two of the town's leading drapery supply stores. Several of the identified shareholders were also politically active and held elected office as either town commissioners or district councillors. Their role and self-image as community leaders and promoters of local development would have required that their support be given to the racing company.

The directors operated the principle of profit-maximisation in their management of the company. They were cost conscious and appreciated that profits were a function of both revenue and expenditure and re-invested the profits in facility improvement.⁹⁹ The launch of the company was accompanied by the promise of dividend payments to investors. The prospectus suggested that a net-profit of £125 was sufficient to pay a five per cent dividend.¹⁰⁰ Despite these promises the directors operated a strict policy of re-investing profits in the early company years. A dividend wasn't issued to shareholders until 1902. The first annual general meeting established a financial management policy that was continued throughout the period of this study. The first two years of trading generated profits of £72 9s. 10d. and £123 respectively that were sufficient to pay close to the suggested dividends but this option was rejected and the profits were transferred to the capital account. This policy reduced the need to make a further call on the shares and allowed a working fund to build up for the time when the company extended its operations to horse and cattle shows.¹⁰¹ This policy added nearly 7 per cent to the value of the subscribed capital. The loss making autumn meets of 1890 (£7. 7s.10d.) and 1891 (£53.16s.3d.) were promptly dropped from the annual programme.¹⁰²

The executive transformed the Newbrook venue into one of the best in a provincial town and developed the infrastructure over its first fifteen years. The course was re-

⁹⁹ Vamplew, *Pay up*, 79.

¹⁰⁰ *WE*, 1 Feb. 1890.

¹⁰¹ *WG*, 9 Jan. 1891

¹⁰² *WG*, 19 Feb. 1892.

modelled and weaknesses were eliminated. Their initial task was to prepare the course for the opening major meet of June 1890. £450 was invested in obtaining title to the lands of the course. The course was enlarged and the finishing straight extended by 'the acquisition of a racetrack from Miss Donlon's' farm for a period of fifty years. Mullingar building contractors G.W. Scott erected the stand and offices, buildings that 'could not be surpassed in this country for both appearances and usefulness' with their solid nature assuring 'perfect safety to visitors'. Extensive track improvements were carried out that included considerable levelling and drainage work. Access from the town to the racecourse was considerably improved.¹⁰³

The independent observations of the special correspondent of the national journal *Sport* were positive. In August 1890, the correspondent visited the course and 'recognised a fairy palace arisen in the place of the rotten old wooden scaffolding that used to represent the Grand Stand at Newbrook'. The complex now included twelve horseboxes, a jockeys' dressing room with 'a dozen lockers for colours, saddles, cloths etc', a pressroom, 'a fully appointed telegraph office, a members' stand that resembled 'the Vice-regal box at Leopardstown', and a refreshment bar. Extensive drainage work was undertaken. 'The treacherous old bog' on the approach to the regulation fence was removed. Modern land reclamation techniques were used to renovate this area of ground. Two thousand tons of soft peat were dug up and were replaced by a layer of stones topped by a layer of gravel and this in turn was covered by 'half a foot of best upland clay'.¹⁰⁴ Additional tenurial security was obtained in 1891 when the lands of Clown were secured on a long-term lease and this allowed the management to develop a flat course that was used for the first time in October 1891.¹⁰⁵

These policies were continued and in 1900 for example, a new road was laid down from the entrance gate to the grand stand.¹⁰⁶ Throughout the early 1900s the directors continued to invest in course improvement. The autumn meeting of 1905 featured a seven-furlong flat track, commended for its speed and safety, that was used for the

¹⁰³ *WG*, 30 May 1890.

¹⁰⁴ *Sport*, 12 Aug. 1890.

¹⁰⁵ *WG*, 19 Feb. 1892.

¹⁰⁶ *MR*, 12 April 1900.

running of the Lough Ennell Plate.¹⁰⁷ A new series of buildings in the enclosure were also in use for the first time at this meet. These included separate dressing room apartments, which separated the professional jockeys and gentlemen riders, and opened directly to the weigh rooms. as well as additional press facilities. These developments enabled ‘the exclusion of all who have not business or right to be in these apartments’ and ‘an amount of annoyance, overcrowding and confusion is avoided’.¹⁰⁸ Work on the development of a new stand for owners and trainers, was in progress.¹⁰⁹ The revised valuation of the buildings on the course provided a quantitative measure of the extent of the improvement after 1890. In 1891 the buildings were valued at £1. 10s. but by 1904 their worth was assessed at £60.¹¹⁰ The value of the capital assets of the company was increased, and at the end of the 1905 season, it was also able to show a balance of over £3,000 in the reserve fund.¹¹¹

The policy of investing profits in course infrastructure meant that the company used traditional fund-raising methods, similar to those used by the enthusiastic volunteer committees of other venues, to generate prize-money. The Town Plate depended on voluntary subscriptions, initially enthusiastically donated by the traders, but as the decade progressed, subscribed with increased reluctance. The subscription pattern of an initial burst of enthusiasm followed by years of decline repeated the trend of the 1870s and 1880s. At the initial shareholders meeting, Lord Greville was fulsome in his praise of ‘the town commissioners and other public-spirited men of Mullingar for their generous subscriptions and the support they have generally given’.¹¹² This generosity however wasn’t to last as the 1891 accounts reported a shortfall of £11.9s.6d. of subscriptions to the town and traders’ plate.¹¹³ The directors in 1892 complained that ‘small country meetings have received more support in their own localities than the inhabitants of this large and prosperous town’, despite the fact that ‘the races brought a great number of people to the town who had to eat something, get wearing apparel and all these things were to be purchased in Mullingar’.¹¹⁴ An attempt

¹⁰⁷ *WE*, 9 Sept. 1905.

¹⁰⁸ *WE*, 9 Sept. 1905.

¹⁰⁹ *WG*, 2 March 1906.

¹¹⁰ VO, Valuation lists: county of Westmeath, district of Mullingar, electoral division of Mullingar rural, number 34, 1891-1904, 15.

¹¹¹ *WG*, 4 March 1906.

¹¹² *WG*, 30 May 1890.

¹¹³ *WG*, 19 Feb. 1892.

¹¹⁴ *WG*, 3 Feb. 1893.

to revive the autumn meeting in 1893 was abandoned when the town commissioners failed to respond to the communications of the company directors. This prompted Lord Greville to suggest that

It must really, be understood by the wealthy inhabitants of this town that unless they help us, not only shall we more or less come to grief, but I venture to say that it would be desirable from a pecuniary point of view, ... because if they give us contributions to enable us to have another meeting in the year it will bring a large number of people into the town, and they wont go out of it without spending money and if they spend their money it must be a very good thing for the trades-people, merchants and others in this town.¹¹⁵

The identity of those who supported the meet and the extent of their support can be established by an examination of the lists of subscribers published in the newspapers. This provides clear evidence that Lord Greville and his co-directors were justified in their condemnation of the level of support from the commercial elements of the town. An examination of the published lists established the identity of 232 different individuals and business people that subscribed to the Town Plate between 1890-96.¹¹⁶ The large number of supporters indicates that consistent support was lacking with a high turnover rate evident amongst subscribers. Numerically, the most supportive entrepreneurial group was that of the licensed grocer and vintner with sixty-five different drink and food dispensing establishments supporting the fund. This group subscribed 32 per cent of the total amount of £377 11s collected and their contributions ranged from a high of 40 per cent in 1892 to a low of 25 per cent in 1891. A second commercial group with a strong vested interest in the success of the races was that of draper and milliner and eleven members provided support to the fund. Two of these, James Doyne, a shareholder and J. W. Gordon, a director were particularly generous and regularly topped the list of contributors. Doyne contributed £19 to the fund over the period and Gordon £17. Social etiquette imposed rigorous sartorial standards on those who frequented the grandstand. A race meeting had considerable commercial potential for drapers as an advertisement placed by the management of Wallis's drapery store pointed out in 1891, 'at no social gathering is a

¹¹⁵ *WG*, 27 Jan. 1894; *WN*, 1 Feb. 1894.

¹¹⁶ The list of subscribers for 1893 was unpublished.

badly dressed person more noticeable than at a race meeting. A good pipe and a handsome walking stick are necessary requirements to a well-dressed man'.¹¹⁷

The total amount collected annually declined sharply also over the six year period. In 1890 the commercial men of Mullingar contributed £83 4s. 6d. but the 1891 collection decreased to £58 14s. 6d. This pattern continued for the rest of the period. This happened despite the positive impact the hosting of the races had on the local economy. At the June 1890 meet the *Westmeath Examiner* reported 'that the shops of every class, from the hotels down to the humblest eating houses were packed' and 'judging from the numbers of people in the shops around, purchasing and spending, from a financial point of view the Newbrook race meeting must have been as good to the business people of the town as three or four fairs'.¹¹⁸

A number of factors may explain the decline in the local financial support for the race meets as the 1890s progressed. The likelihood was that those who were expected to subscribe had already supported racing by becoming shareholders. Race organisers faced competition from other sports organisers. As can be seen from chapter three, members of the bicycle club promoted a major athletics meet in the 1890s and depended on the support of the business classes for its success. The merchant class of the town also organised their own form of conspicuous recreation from 1894 onwards when an annual regatta, traditionally one of the great forms of gentry and aristocratic summer recreation, was promoted at Lough Belvedere.¹¹⁹ The regatta provided a more 'respectable' recreational outlet than the race meet. Here middle-class respectability was the order of the day.

Town-folk can spend a most enjoyable a time, well spent time, with out being deafened by the eternal shouts and the exhaustless chatter of the ring. At a regatta people are not jostled about by perhaps shady specimens of humanity and are not tempted on 'hearing a straight thing' by putting 'a bit on'.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ WG, 30 May 1890.

¹¹⁸ WE, 7 June 1890.

¹¹⁹ WG, 6 Oct. 1894, 2 Aug. 1895, 11 Sept. 1896; WN, 22 July 1897; WE, 10 Sept. 1898; MR, 3 Aug. 1899; WE, 4 Aug. 1900, 7 Aug. 1904;

¹²⁰ WE, 2 Aug. 1900.

The organising committee of this regatta was formed from some of the main commercial men of the town, formed from similar social groups, as those who were active in organising race meets in Athlone and Kilbeggan.

The uncertain nature of public support encouraged the directors to convert the Mullingar meet to a gate meet by erecting an enclosing wall around the course. This was first suggested in 1893 and overdraft facilities of £1,800 were negotiated with the Hibernian Bank.¹²¹ Enclosure also created the opportunity to expand the range of events hosted at the course. These included coursing meets 'on which they (the directors) expected to make considerable profit', horse and agricultural shows, football matches and other games'.¹²² The death of the landlord P. N. Fitzgerald in 1893 halted these plans and negotiations were re-opened with the agent of the estate that ended with the purchase of the landlord's interest in the Newbrook lands.¹²³ The purchase cost led to the temporary abandonment of the proposed enclosure. A permanent improvement account was then set up and the annual profits were henceforth paid into this account.¹²⁴ The plan was revised in 1901 and at a special meeting held on 15 July 1901 the shareholders approved the funding of the development by the issue of 2,000, £1 preference shares, limited to the original shareholders, the shares to bear a special preference cumulative interest of 5 per cent annually.¹²⁵ At the same time negotiations were conducted with the MGWR Company to erect a siding that allowed direct access to the racecourse for visitors and horses. These were completed in early 1902 and the work was completed the following year.¹²⁶ The commercialisation and commodification of racing was achieved in the early part of 1903 when the surrounding wall was completed and the spring meeting of 1903 became the first gate meeting held in Westmeath.

The conversion allowed the directors to recommend the payment of a 5 per cent share dividend to both categories of shareholders for the first time in 1904. The directors, particularly the managing directors, were also remunerated following some debate on the most appropriate method of reward. The suggestion that a fixed sum of £50 be

¹²¹ *WG*, 19 May 1893.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *WN*, 1 Feb. 1894, 26 March 1896.

¹²⁴ *WG*, 22 Feb. 1895.

¹²⁵ *MR*, 20 July 1901.

¹²⁶ *WE*, 15 March 1902, 14 March 1903.

paid annually to the directors was rejected in favour of a payment of 10 per cent of the net profits with half of this sum being paid to the managing directors. Supporters of the former option favoured providing more resources for prize-money to induce 'the owners of valuable horses to bring them to Mullingar'.¹²⁷ However at the 1905 annual general meeting, the fixed sum option of rewarding directors was adopted. It was felt that the percentage of net profits option was insufficient to recompense the directors for their input to the organising and managing of races, the racecourse and events.¹²⁸ The debate was somewhat academic as the Directors' Plate with prize-money of £150 was the feature event of the June meets from 1903 onwards, and in effect the directors returned their fees.

The conversion of the Mullingar racing meet to a gate one had important implications for the organisation of the races. The era of the free show was ended and extra funds were placed at the disposal of the race company. Those managing the turnstiles did so with exemplary zeal and according to *Sport* complaints were made that the men employed were not familiar with those entitled to free admission and in 'one instance a steward of the meeting would not be allowed pass'.¹²⁹ The additional finance generated allowed the directors to abandon revenue-generating activities that impacted negatively on the course. Cattle grazing was terminated in 1903 and as a result the course 'enjoyed a large supply of herbage' and the improved safety encouraged owners to race their horses at the 1903 summer meet despite the long spell of dry weather experienced.¹³⁰

By 1905 the nature of the Mullingar races had been transformed. The immediate impact of enclosure was an increase in annual prize-money as the directors attempted to attract large crowds and good quality horses to compete at Mullingar. The amount on offer increased by 73 per cent from £565 to £975 between 1902 and 1905. The spring and autumn meets were regularised and these meets were the major beneficiaries from the additional revenue available. The available prize-money at the autumn meet was increased by 59 per cent from £195 to £310 between 1902 and 1905 whilst the spring meet money was almost quadrupled. The impact was perhaps most

¹²⁷ *WE*, 14 Sept. 1904.

¹²⁸ *WE*, 11 March 1905.

¹²⁹ *Sport*, 10 June 1905.

¹³⁰ *WE*, 6 June 1903.

clearly evident in the transformation of the spring meet from a typical hunt club meet to one that was open and commercially driven. In 1905, fifty horses took part in the meet that offered total prize-money of £265 and also offered the Greville Cup valued at 100 sovereigns and the Westmeath Hunt Cup similarly valued.¹³¹ The Directors' Plate of £150 became the feature event of the June meet from 1903 onwards replacing the Town Plate and its financial uncertainties. In 1905, the *Westmeath Examiner* justifiably claimed that

From a pleasant and large but entirely provincial meeting in character, the Mullingar races have been raised to a level in which the pleasure is enhanced by increased accommodation and good order, the interest augmented by the attraction of the best class of horses to the contests, and the importance of the fixture brought to a grade where Newbrook ranks practically in all respects, but proximity to the city – as a metropolitan course.¹³²

This was reflected in the growth in the annual profits. The gross profits for 1905 were £1035 12s. and gave a net return of £661 15s.¹³³

Mullingar now offered greater prize-money than provincial towns of similar status. In 1904, the Mullingar summer meet offered a prize-fund of £415 far greater than towns such as Claremorris (£137), Ballinasloe (£233), Ballinrobe (£131), Enniscorthy (£152) and Thurles (£205).¹³⁴ The Mullingar races had been transformed 'from a mere local event' to 'one of first rate importance' and 'one of the foremost and most popular in Ireland'.¹³⁵

Racing and the railways

In this context the impact of the railway on the development of racing is worthy of consideration. This aspect of the sport has been rigorously scrutinised in the British context. The railways revolutionised racing according to Vamplew. They transformed many local meetings into national events that attracted both horses and spectators from all over the country, more horses were raced, and the coming of the railway lines

¹³¹ *WE*, 5 April 1905.

¹³² *WE*, 10 June 1905.

¹³³ *WG*, 2 March 1906.

¹³⁴ *Racing calendar*, 1904, 128-9; *Ibid*, 151-2; *Ibid*, 146-8; *Ibid*, 145-6; *Ibid*, 141-5.

¹³⁵ *WE*, 6 June 1903.

was responsible for increased prize-money.¹³⁶ Fergus D’Arcy has expressed similar opinions in relation to Irish racing.¹³⁷ Neil Tranter considered that the sport was transformed, in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, by the effect of rail travel on the interested parties ‘from a localised activity of mediocre standard to a thoroughly commercial and professional recreation based around a calendar of major meetings from all parts of the country’. Proximity to a railway station soon became crucial to the success of a course.¹³⁸ Brailsford also believed that the railway was ‘a main factor in the success or failure of individual meetings’.¹³⁹ More recent and detailed analysis conducted by John Tolson has challenged these conclusions. Tolson concluded that change in flat racing came from within the sport itself made possible when the post-1870 Jockey Club ‘made its previous tenuous control a reality’ and totally reshaped the industry in the final decades of the century. The role of the railway was one that ‘facilitated and assisted certain trends and events’.¹⁴⁰

Evidence from Westmeath would tend to support the Tolson thesis. The development of the Westmeath railway infrastructure has been outlined in the introduction.¹⁴¹ Racing in Mullingar experienced difficulties in the 1870s and particularly in the 1880s despite the proximity of the course to the railway station and it wasn’t until the limited company was established that the races were firstly revived and then transformed. Crucially, this company provided a designated racing venue in Mullingar and this specialised setting ended uncertainty regarding the promotion of races and allowed the development of a summer meet where previous events were confined to end of hunting season events.

An individual, whose primary business depended on railway-generated trade rather than the rail company, initially influenced the development of racing in the town. Patrick Costello was the proprietor of the refreshment saloon at the terminus of the Mullingar station and was conscious of the commercial potential of race promotion to

¹³⁶ Vamplew, *The Turf*, 53.

¹³⁷ Fergus D’Arcy, *Horses*, 144-152.

¹³⁸ Tranter, *Sport, economy and society*, 34.

¹³⁹ D. Brailsford, *Sport, time and society: the British at play*, London, 1991, 69.

¹⁴⁰ Tolson, ‘Railways and racing’, 352.

¹⁴¹ See Introduction, 7-8.

his primary business.¹⁴² In 1850 and 1851, Costello was involved in the promotion of a race meet at Lynn, located about two miles from the railway terminus. He developed improved spectator facilities and for the 1851 meet he constructed a stand-house to accommodate at least 2,000 people with an interior divided into two saloons supplied 'with all the good things to which field sports are supposed to give a peculiar relish'.¹⁴³ The MGWR offered cheap return fares in 1851 and for the 1852 meet the first special train to serve a Westmeath race-meet was dispatched from Dublin with 200 passengers on board.¹⁴⁴ Despite Costello's entrepreneurial zeal and rail company support, both meets failed as spectator events.

Costello believed that this was partly due to the inconvenience of the journey from the terminus to the racecourse and he developed a new venue for the 1852 meet. He obtained a lease on lands at Newbrook, located much closer to the terminus, and fitted them out with the normal racecourse infrastructure that included a stand house, saloons that stocked 'every description of refreshment' and an enclosure reserved in the stand house specifically for ladies. A new link road between the terminus and the course was built, and passengers on the trains from Galway and Dublin were able to disembark on a special platform built by the MGWR directors close to the stand house.¹⁴⁵ The new course was considered to be one of the best in Ireland and consisted of a two-mile circuit of fourteen fences that included six water jumps 'of a fair hunting character'.¹⁴⁶ The 1852 two-day meet offered Costello additional commercial opportunities as each night many of the racing gentlemen attended the ordinaries, at Costello's saloon, at the railway station.¹⁴⁷ Costello's involvement was unashamedly commercial with his investment designed to exploit the potential the opportunities the new rail system presented to the racing community. He maintained his involvement until the mid-1870s by which time he combined the duties of secretary, treasurer and clerk of the course, and during which time he continued to invest in course and infrastructure improvement.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴² *WG*, 25 April 1850. Costello in November 1849 offered visitors to the town fair the 'provisions and comforts of a first class hotel, combined with economy and attention.' ... 'Wines, spirits, liqueurs, cigars etc. of the most choice descriptions [sic].'

¹⁴³ *WG*, 9 May 1850, 17 April, 1 May 1851.

¹⁴⁴ *WG*, Nov. 1852.

¹⁴⁵ *WG*, 28 Oct. 1852.

¹⁴⁶ *WG*, 4 Nov. 1852.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ *WG*, 16 May 1872, 5 June 1873, 28 May 1874.

At this time, the Westmeath Hunt Club began to organise steeplechases and with Costello apparently based in Dublin, the Newbrook annual meet became uncertain. The 1875 and 1876 meets failed to take place. The revived meet of 1877 was helped by the fact that Percy Nugent Fitzgerald was the new tenant of the Newbrook course and he combined the duties of secretary, treasurer and clerk of the course.¹⁴⁹ Fitzgerald was based in Multyfarnham, about six miles from Mullingar, and was involved in all aspects of the equestrian business including racing, breeding and hunting.¹⁵⁰ Criticism of a 7s 6d entry fee to the stand house encouraged Fitzgerald to outline some of the difficulties and expense involved for the racing promoter. A proper stand house had to be provided, loan ground purchased, stake money guaranteed, damage to farm land repaired in addition to funding a multiplicity of incidental labour and other expenses.¹⁵¹ Despite the fact that the 1882 meet was considered to be ‘one of the most successful meetings ever held over the celebrated Newbrook course’, the committee experienced difficulty in funding the annual Newbrook meet for the remainder of the decade.¹⁵² The 1884 and 1885 events failed to take place and this prompted the town commissioners to organise an event for 1886. The enthusiasm of the commissioners wasn’t to continue and this meeting was the last organised in Mullingar during the 1880s. Despite the proximity to the railway station, difficulties with organising finance, the maintenance of course infrastructure and problems with reaching agreement with the course proprietor proved insurmountable.

The fate of the Newbrook meet supports the summary of Huggins and Tolson who considered that ‘closure was usually linked with refusal to renew a lease, the withdrawal of upper-class support, building development, poor entries or the death of a major organiser and supporter rather than with poor attendance’.¹⁵³ The demise of the Garrycastle meet analysed earlier in this chapter provides similar supportive evidence. In the nineteenth century, mass spectator attendance wasn’t an important factor in viability, as entrance was free for the majority of those attending. It wasn’t until 1903, when the Mullingar meet became fully commercialised, that the role of the railway in

¹⁴⁹ *WG*, 24 May 1877.

¹⁵⁰ Dease, *Westmeath hunt*, 88.

¹⁵¹ *WG*, June 13 1878.

¹⁵² *WG*, 2 June 1882

¹⁵³ Mike Huggins and John Tolson, ‘The railways and sport in Victorian Britain: a critical reassessment’ in *The Journal of Transport History*, 22, 2, 2001, 103.

transporting large numbers of spectators to the June meet in particular, became important in the promotion of the Mullingar races.

The introduction of commercial sponsorship associated with railway development in Ireland was considered by Fergus Darcy to be of 'major benefit' to Irish racing.¹⁵⁴ Rail company support of the Mullingar races was first given in March 1849 when the MGWR directors ordered that '£25 be placed at the disposal of the Revd. Mr. Savage, Mullingar, as its contribution to the Mullingar steeplechase'.¹⁵⁵ This contribution was increased in 1853 when the directors subscribed a sum of £30 to the race fund.¹⁵⁶ The MGWR, board according to D'Arcy, more generously supported Irish racing than other companies, as its directors included many personalities deeply involved in racing.¹⁵⁷ The Westmeath influence on the board of directors included members of the Nugent, Rochfort and O'Reilly families, all strongly associated with the racing business. Whilst D'Arcy produces no supporting statistics to confirm the claim of MGWR benevolence, the overall contribution by rail companies to national racing sponsorship was quite small. In 1876, rail companies contributed £632 10s., or just 2 per cent, to the total national race prize-money of £30,502. In 1901, this sponsorship had increased to £903 but proportionally had declined to only 1.76 per cent.¹⁵⁸

The impact of railway sponsorship on prize-money in Westmeath was proportionally more significant. The Mullingar meet was the chief beneficiary. In the period between 1890-1905 a total of £10,248 was available in prize-money in the county and of this £515 or 5.02 per cent was provided by the MGWR Company in direct sponsorship of a railway plate. The Garrycastle meet of 1857-1868 received £200 in direct sponsorship from the MGWR a sum that amounted to 5.6 per cent of the total prize-money of £3563 10s. The MGWR also subscribed to the fund for the Athlone races in

¹⁵⁴ D'Arcy, *Horses*, 145. Rail sponsorship began in June 1844 when the Dublin & Drogheda railway company added twenty-five sovereigns to a sweepstake handicap at Bellewstown, county Louth.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁵⁶ *WG*, 7 April 1853.

¹⁵⁷ D'Arcy, *Horses*, 149.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 146. *WG*, 30 Sept. 1887. G.A. Boyd Rochfort at the time of his death in 1887 had been vice-chairman of the MGWR for nearly twenty years. This relatively small sponsorship compared to the total prize money available was proportionately greater than in mainland Britain where the respective proportions amounted to only 0.11 per cent and 0.04 per cent respectively for the years 1874 and 1901; see John Tolson, *Railways and Racing*, 142.

the 1890s and offered special deals to owners for the transport of horses to and from the Athlone and Mullingar meets.

The rail link was also crucial in extending the hinterland of the Mullingar course. An analysis of the addresses of those who raced horses at Newbrook at the summer meet illustrates the importance of this aspect. Horses owned by 292 different owners competed in Mullingar on 592 separate occasions. The place of residence of 184 of these owners has been identified and their level of participation is illustrated in Table 14. Eighty-three per cent of those identified as resident outside the county only competed once or twice at the meet. The great majority of the unidentified also made only single entries to the meet.

Frequency of participation	Westmeath	Outside the county	Unidentified owners
1	27	62	116
2	14	31	25
3	4	13	15
4	2	8	6
5	6	1	-
6	2	1	1
7	2	2	-
8	-	2	-
9	-	1	1
10	1	-	-
13	1	-	-
18	1	-	-
19	1	-	-

Table 14: Place of residence of owners and their frequency of participation in the Mullingar June meet, 1890-1905.

The geographical location of the identified non-residents is illustrated in Figure 8. The well-developed railway network provided access to Mullingar, from all parts of the country. Distance was no longer an obstacle to those who wished to race a horse in the town. Therefore owners from twenty-six different counties raced horses in Mullingar, some from places as distant as Waterford, Londonderry, Tyrone, Mayo, Antrim and Cork. The main group of identified non-Westmeath owners came from three eastern counties: thirty-four owners were Dublin based and twenty-four each were Kildare or Meath residents.

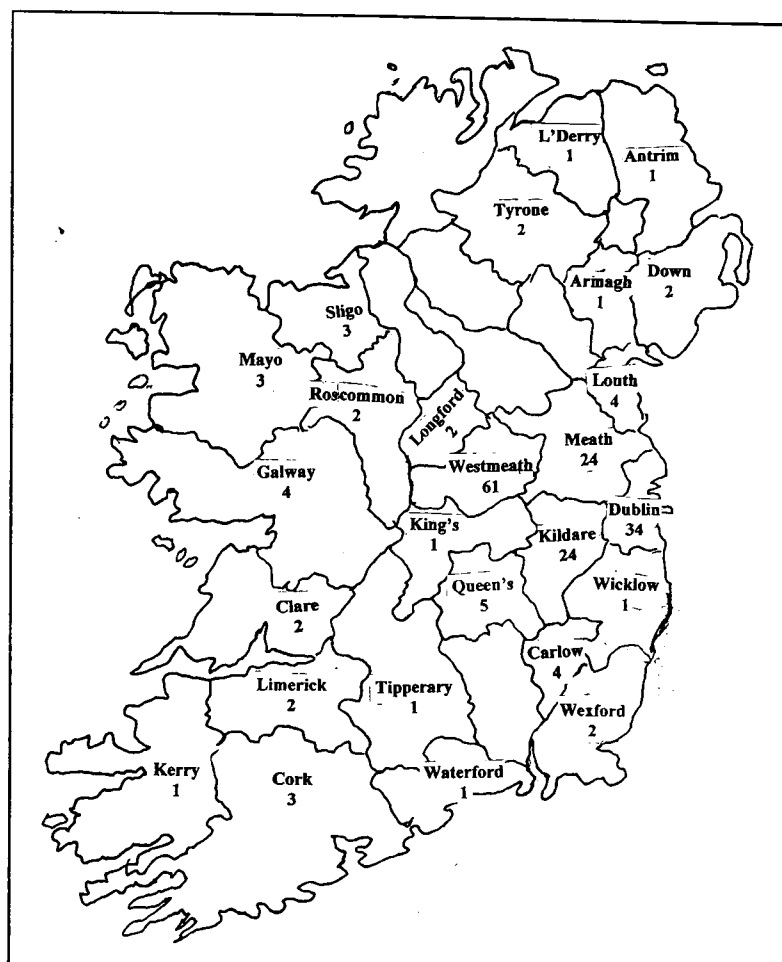


Figure 8: Places of residence of owners who raced horses in Mullingar at June meeting, 1890-1905.

Westmeath participation

This study aims to produce a comprehensive analysis of the organisation, participation rates, participants and management of sport in Westmeath and therefore a more detailed examination of the Westmeath owners who competed at the June meet will be undertaken in this section. Sixty-one different Westmeath based owners, or 20.89 per cent of the total number of owners, raced horses at the meet. The common denominator between these was land ownership whether as landed gentry or substantial tenant farmers. A small number of professional men were also involved. Farmers who raced horses formed a representative cross section of the Westmeath farming community of the time. Many shared common membership of the Westmeath Hunt Club; forty-four of the sixty-one had subscribed to the hunt club at least once between 1890-1901.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ Based on an analysis of the lists of subscribers to the Westmeath Hunt Club for the period 1890-1901.

Members of the Westmeath landed gentry formed less than half of the owners; twenty-seven of the Westmeath resident owners were landed estate proprietors. Members of this group tended to be involved in more than one aspect of the business. The Boyd-Rochfort family, of Middleton Park, Castletown-Geoghegan, was the most important of this group. Three members of the family raced horses at Mullingar on fourteen occasions between 1898-1904. The Boyd-Rochforts were involved in all aspects of equestrian sport and developed an important stud farming operation at Middleton Park. The *Westmeath Examiner*, in May 1905, reported on a visit made by one of its journalists to the demesne, and while it is essentially a propaganda piece, the report gives some idea of the professional nature of the business carried on there. Two thoroughbred stallions with impressive racing and breeding records and six brood mares were at stud. The chief of these was Simony II, a stallion that was purchased as a yearling for 3,200 guineas. The progeny of Simony II and the Boyd-Rochfort brood mare Liz, Evie was a winner of the Stanley Stakes at Liverpool in 1904 and was later sold for £1,000.¹⁶⁰ Two others with connections to the Boyd-Rochfort estate also raced horses in Mullingar. G.V. Reid contested races on five occasions between 1895 and 1903. Reid gained his experience during the minority of George Rochfort, when for almost a decade he managed the stud farm and racing business of the estate.¹⁶¹ While based at Middleton Park, he maintained a few horses of his own and 'had more than average success'.¹⁶² On leaving Middleton Park, he purchased a farm at Kilgarvan, Streamstown, and established a small racing stable. James Cheshire, who raced on only one occasion, had acted as a jockey for the Rochfort family and by 1900 had set up his own training establishment in Castletown-Geoghegan and was also a registered professional jockey.

A. J. Pilkington was another with a landed gentry background who raced a number of times at Mullingar. He entered horses on five occasions with his wife and brother responsible for one entrant each. Pilkington was a professional trainer and by 1898 was based at Woodlands, Mullingar where he trained a string of thirteen horses for a number of mainly Westmeath based owners.¹⁶³ In 1898, he turned out six winners nationally with total earnings of £642 10s., and in 1899, he trained ten winners

¹⁶⁰ *WE*, 27 May 1905.

¹⁶¹ *WE*, 11 June 1904.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ *Sport*, 21 Jan. 1898.

earning £1,172 in the process. Pilkington was a member of a family that owned an estate of 1,683 acres at Tyrrellspass, in the returns of 1875.¹⁶⁴ He was educated in England and a graduate of the Oxford Military College where he received a solid training in horsemanship. Pilkington applied these skills by regular participation in the Westmeath Hunt and he was also active in the events organised by the Westmeath Polo Club.¹⁶⁵ One of those who placed horses in Pilkington's stable was William Thomas Brabazon, a farmer who resided at Johnston House, near Mullingar.¹⁶⁶ Brabazon raced horses on six occasions at the summer meet and enjoyed some success as he finished in the winner's enclosure on two occasions. Thomas Dibbs, a Mullingar based farmer, also raced horses on six occasions there. Another local supporter of the meet was James Brabazon of Mount Dalton, Rathconrath, Mullingar. In the seven years prior to his sudden death in 1893 he had been one 'of the leading supporters of the Irish turf', and as an owner and breeder had produced the winner of some of the principal Irish races.¹⁶⁷

Infrequent participation in the June Mullingar meet does not necessarily mean a low level of involvement in the racing business. In some cases it meant a more serious involvement in steeplechasing; for others it meant that their interests were concentrated on the flat racing aspect of the activity. These aspects are well illustrated by the involvement of T. M. Reddy. Reddy only raced once at Mullingar but was extremely committed to the sport and was involved in hunting, steeplechasing and breeding. Reddy emigrated to Argentina as a seventeen year old in 1856 and established himself as a sheep, cattle and goat farmer.¹⁶⁸ He invested in land and on his return to Ireland he purchased two areas of land outside Mullingar at Culleen. He maintained his Argentine properties and in 1905 he was the owner of 45,000 acres of land within 120 miles of Buenos Aires. The *British Hunts and Huntsmen* reported that in 1910 he owned 30,000 sheep, 8,000 horned cattle and 500 horses and mares 'of superior class' in Argentina.¹⁶⁹ The horses were bred from eight Irish mares that he

¹⁶⁴ *Return of owners of land*, 85.

¹⁶⁵ *Walford's county families of the United Kingdom, a royal manual of the titled and untitled aristocracy of England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland*, London, 1915, 985.

¹⁶⁶ Aubrey Brabazon, *Racing through my mind*, Ardmore, 1993, 2.

¹⁶⁷ *WN*, 27 April 1893, His mare 'Gentle Annie' captured the Metropolitan Plate at Baldoyle, the Grand Stand Plate at Cork and the second Coyningham Cup at Punchestown.

¹⁶⁸ *British Hunts and Huntsmen*, 417.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 418.

had imported in 1874 and he also purchased well-bred sires in Ireland and had them exported to Argentina. Reddy, a nationalist and supporter of nationalist causes, immersed himself in the culture of the landed gentry in so far as it involved recreation. He became a member of the Westmeath hunt and also enjoyed 'sport' with the Ward Union and Meath hunts.¹⁷⁰ A racecourse was set out on his land and was used as the venue for the Westmeath Hunt Club races and point-to-point meets during the 1880s. He raced his horses extensively being successful at Westmeath, Roscommon and Athboy hunt and point-to-point meets. However his racing activities weren't limited to confined hunt events as he also raced horses successfully in the Curragh, Leopardstown and the Phoenix Park. Cornelius Hannan was the proprietor of a 'well ordered though small home of the thoroughbred', at Riverstown, Killucan, who also raced only once. He was the proprietor of one of the most professional and racing oriented stud farms in the county. The thoroughbred, Marmiton, in whose 'ancestry were the winners of classic races' was its prize asset and was standing from 1892 at a 'fee of £10 for matrons of pure descent'.¹⁷¹ The sire was successful and regularly featured in the annual lists of leading studs, its progeny winning £1,348 19s. in 1898 for instance.¹⁷² Captain Cecil Fetherstonhaugh, director of the race company, was another once off competitor at Mullingar who was also heavily committed to breeding. In 1896, he claimed to have been involved in breeding for over twenty-years during which time he had been the owner of several stallions and had acted as judge at several shows nationwide.¹⁷³ Others who raced on only one or two occasions included members of the professions such as E. A. Shaw, a solicitor, Michael Cleary, a veterinary surgeon, and Dr. Dooley.

The altered nature of Westmeath racing and the changed fortunes of the landed interests involved in the sport are best illustrated by the economic profile of those individuals who raced horses most often at Mullingar. These men were at the opposite end of the land ownership hierarchy to those who raced horses most often at Garrycastle in the 1860s. The four who raced horses most often were farmers, rather than landed estate proprietors, and of the four, two subscribed to the hunt. Their

¹⁷⁰ *British Hunts and Huntsmen*, 418.

¹⁷¹ *Sport*, 5 March 1892.

¹⁷² *Irish Field*, 12 Nov. 1898.

¹⁷³ *Commission on horse breeding*, 50-51.

frequency of participation and the size and valuation of their holdings is illustrated in Table 15.

Name	Size of holding	Valuation	Frequency horses raced in Mullingar
F.W. Mitchell	280a-3r-31p	£166 10s.	19
James Cole	201a-1r-9p	£110 5s.	18
Christopher Taaffee	118a-0r-9p	£95	13
James Yourell	92a-1r-10p	£75 18s.	10

Table 15: Frequency of participation, extent and value of holdings of four most active Westmeath resident owners at Mullingar June races, 1890-1905.

Mitchell maintained a small stable of steeplechase horses that were raced nationwide. He raced his best horse, The Admiral, an incredible 162 times over a ten year period, in which the horse was a winner fifth-four times.¹⁷⁴ Mitchell’s involvement in national racing can be illustrated by looking at the performance of The Admiral in 1892, when he raced fifteen times between February and November. This returned eleven wins for prize-money of £234 18s. Mitchell combined the role of trainer and jockey and was able to reduce his racing expenses considerably so in 1892 his investment in The Admiral was likely to show a net profit.¹⁷⁵ In the same owner-trainer-jockey-farmer tradition as Mitchell was Ballynacarrigy resident James Yourell, who raced horses on ten occasions in Mullingar and acted as jockey on all but one occasion. Like Mitchell, he was also active on the national scene. The 1894 national odyssey of Yourell with the horse Bass was extraordinary under any circumstances. His season began on 26 March at Fairyhouse where the horse finished third in the Irish Grand National and ended on 3 November at Leopardstown; the horse earned a total of £265 10s from ten race wins.¹⁷⁶ The horse was raced an incredible thirty times at venues as distant from Mullingar as Enniscrone, Castlebar and Claremorris (Figure 9). James Yourell farmed approximately ninety-five acres of land at Ballynacarrigy and Sonna and used the income generated from the land to finance his racing activities. According to family tradition he emigrated to Argentina

¹⁷⁴ Williams and Hyland, *Irish Grand National*, 46-7. Mitchell’s chief success happened in 1894 when rode and trained The Admiral to win the Irish Grand National and the prize of £245, a nice reward for an owner who had never previously won a stake of more than £25.
¹⁷⁵ *Racing calendar*, 1893. The horse was raced at Attanah, Birr, Galway, Ballivor, Castlebar, Boyle, Rathkeale, Ballinrobe, Carnew, Kilkenny, Inchicore, Limerick and three times at Dundalk.
¹⁷⁶ *Racing calendar*, 1894, 291.

around 1870 and returned twenty years later with finance, which he may also have used to begin his racing career. His interest in racing was solely for the sport and reputedly he had no interest in the gambling or breeding aspects of the business.¹⁷⁷ Christopher Taaffee contested thirteen races at Mullingar and was also involved in the breeding business and hired a private trainer, Frank Byrne, for his small racing stable at Rathaspic, Rathowen, where he farmed 118 acres of high quality land valued at £101.¹⁷⁸

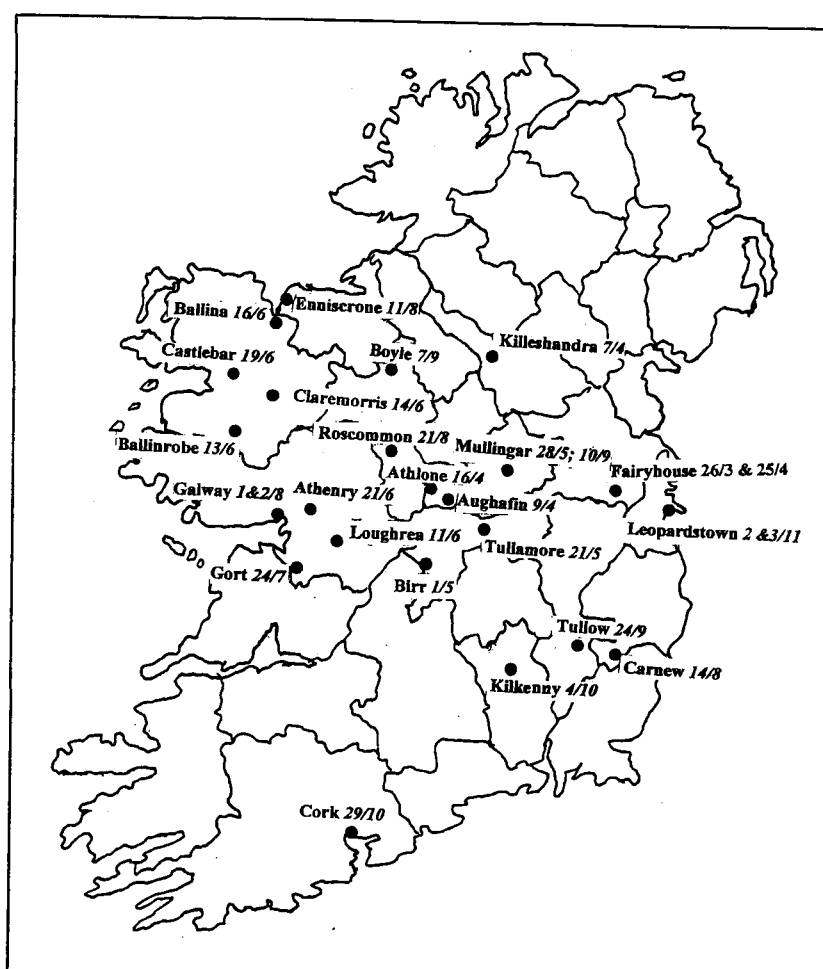


Figure 9: Venues and dates where Bass, the property of James Yourell, raced in 1894.

The broad appeal of racing in Westmeath in the 1890s is illustrated by the different family and personal circumstances of the owners who raced most often in Mullingar. These men, with the exception of Yourell, farmed extensive and high value holdings and occupied substantial dwellings. The homes did not match those of the landed gentry, but they stood apart from other houses in their localities with substantial out-offices. All occupied first or second-class houses according to the criteria of the 1901 Census. F.W. Mitchell who lived in a second-class house, was a thirty-nine year old

¹⁷⁷ Information gathered from speaking to grandson and niece on 25 Oct. 2002.

¹⁷⁸ *Sport*, 23 December 1899.

member of the Church of Ireland in 1901, and was married with a young family of four children, that ranged between one and six years of age.¹⁷⁹ Yourell was a forty-year old bachelor who lived with his mother in a second-class house (valued at £5. 15s.) that had four stables attached at Piercefield, where they farmed 118 acres of land.¹⁸⁰ James Cole, was a sixty year old, who farmed two areas of land with a combined area of 201 acres, valued at £120 5s. He shared a first class house at the Pass of Kilbride with his wife Mary. His two sons also resided in the family home and acted as jockeys on occasion. He also employed one stable boy in 1901.¹⁸¹

Female participation

Five Westmeath women raced horses in Mullingar as can be seen from Table 16.¹⁸² Miss Alice Boyd-Rochfort raced on five occasions between 1897-99, her mother Mrs Boyd-Rochfort on four occasions between 1899-1901. All were the wives, widows or daughters of known male owners. The racing world was male dominated and the actual female involvement in preparing and managing the horses is likely to have been minimal. Mrs Boyd-Rochfort had managed the family estate during the nine years minority of her eldest son Arthur following the death of her husband Major Hamilton Boyd-Rochfort in January 1891.¹⁸³

Evidence from a 1900 court case that involved Alice Boyd-Rochfort and her mother illustrate the complexities of female ownership at this time. Alice Boyd-Rochfort attained her majority in December 1899 and eloped in January 1900 and married P.P. O'Reilly, an important figure in the world of Westmeath sports, from Coolamber Manor, in north Westmeath. As the court evidence suggested 'he was the son of a gentleman of high position in county Westmeath, a Deputy-Lieutenant, a director of a bank'.¹⁸⁴ He was also a member of a Catholic family and the ecumenical tastes of the

¹⁷⁹ *Census of Ireland 1901*, Enumerators' forms: VO, Valuation lists, county of Westmeath, district of Mullingar, electoral division of Portloman, revisions of 1893-1907, 47.

¹⁸⁰ VO, Valuation lists, county of Westmeath, district of Mullingar, electoral division of Portloman, revisions of 1893-1907, 47.

¹⁸¹ *Census of Ireland, 1901*, Enumerators' form.

¹⁸² Other women who raced horses at Mullingar included Lady Clancarty on four occasions, Mrs N. J. Kelly and Mrs Stackpole on two occasions. Mrs Stackpole, was an Ennis resident whose late husband was heavily involved in steeple-chasing and hunting and had maintained his own harrier pack in county Clare.

¹⁸³ Bill Curling, *The Captain: a biography of Captain Sir Cecil Boyd-Rochfort, royal trainer*, London, 1970, 4-5.

¹⁸⁴ *Sport*, 16 June 1900.

Protestant, Mrs Boyd-Rochfort, were unable to accommodate a Catholic son in law. Jewellery, some property and horses were confiscated and the younger lady initiated court proceedings for the return of the articles and horses and claimed ‘£1,000 damages for the detention of the goods and chattels’. Evidence from the case presents an opportunity to examine the complicated business of female horse ownership at the turn of the century. Alice claimed ownership of seven horses ‘some of which were well known to racing men in Ireland’. She began her ownership career in 1894, when her mother made her a present of a pony and a chestnut horse. In 1896, these were sold for a sum of £170. Her mother retained the finance raised from the sale and distributed it to her daughter as required. In 1897 the plaintiff owned four horses and in December a fifth horse called Coollatin was sourced for her by the agent and was raced in her name in 1898-99. The steward and agent of the estate had entered these horses under ‘Miss Alice’s’ name. The agent purchased three more horses for her in 1899. These horses were also raced under her name and she accepted the prizes that were won. However, the young lady never paid any money for these horses, her mother paid from the amount that remained from the original 1896 sale. In her evidence to the court she claimed to have always settled with the jockey. At the end of each racing year the racing accounts were settled and her mother always received the monies because the transactions were carried out in her mother’s name. Alice never paid for any of the horses of disputed ownership because it was her understanding that the money for them came out of the amount in her mother’s keeping. Following this evidence the court was adjourned for a short period during which time a settlement was reached with the senior Boyd-Rochfort agreeing to pay a sum of £275 damages to her daughter whilst maintaining that ‘neither in law nor on the merits had the plaintiff any right to any portion of the property beyond that admitted’.¹⁸⁵ The case illustrates the somewhat tenuous nature of the ownership title possessed by the females. This case was played out between two women but there is no doubt that in the relationship between male and female family members the hierarchy of authority would be more rigidly demarcated. Miss Mina Reddy was the nineteen-year old daughter of T. M. Reddy and her name appears thrice as the owner of a runner in Mullingar in 1904-5.¹⁸⁶ The participation of women as registered owners in racing at this time was extremely limited. The evidence based on the Westmeath experience suggests their

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ *Census of Ireland, 1901*, enumerators’ form.

involvement resulted from their domestic circumstances. Of the married ladies, all were married to men with an involvement in racing and the two unmarried ladies also shared unusual domestic situations. Alice Boyd-Rochfort’s situation has already been described and Miss Reddy was an only daughter of an extremely wealthy Mullingar landowner, the real wealth generating elements of his economic enterprises were based in Argentina.

Name	Title	Years	Occasions horses raced
Boyd-Rochfort, Alice	Miss	1897-99	5
Boyd-Rochfort	Mrs	1899-1901	4
Reddy	Miss	1904-5	3
Pilkington	Mrs	1900	1
Levigne C. E.	Mrs	1904	1

Table 16: Westmeath resident women who raced horses in Mullingar summer meet, 1890-1905.

The Westmeath racing community

The sixty-one individuals who raced horses at the Mullingar summer meet formed a strong community, bonded by their involvement in racing, and they regularly raced horses outside the county. A distinguishing feature of this community was the number of farmers involved. The most active farmed their land and owned and trained their horses such as F.W. Mitchell and James Yourell, but J. H. Locke and other wealthier owners adopted a more specialist approach and placed horses with professional Curragh based trainers. Locke typified the man of industry who entered racing without the backing of a landed estate and who required the services of a professional Curragh trainer to manage his racing interests. He was a Kilbeggan based industrialist, who with his brother John managed the family whiskey distilling firm. Andy Bielenberg, in his history of the firm, documents the involvement of Locke in the traditional hunting-steeplechasing pursuits of the country gentleman. He began hunting at the age of seven with the Tullamore Harriers, a pack that frequently stopped for lunch at the family home at Ardnagluie. Locke when he wasn’t managing the distillery business lived the full life of a country gentleman.¹⁸⁷ He was one of the

¹⁸⁷ Andy Bielenberg, *Locke’s distillery, a history*, Dublin 1993, 62-3.

main initiators of the revived Kilbeggan meeting in 1901 but despite his involvement his only runner at the venue didn't compete until 1920.¹⁸⁸ His chief recreational passion was polo and he regularly participated in Ledeston during the summer months and many of his polo ponies were raced at the annual Westmeath Polo Club races. His chief interest in racing was in the more expensive flat racing sector where he had a number of horses based with professional Curragh trainers. Members of the professions would have followed a similar practice.

Westmeath owners also regularly raced horses outside the county. The *Westmeath Guardian* reporter on 8 May 1896 boasted 'of the long and practically unbroken succession of victories' achieved by Westmeath owners and suggested that 'Westmeath horses just now seem to be making their own of the Irish racecourse'. At Birr, horses from the county won four of the five races on the card: in the same week Westmeath based owners had three victories in Enniskillen and two successes at the Trim meet.¹⁸⁹ In a single week in May 1900 three Westmeath owners G.E. Reid, R.G. Cleary and P. Casey owned winners at Enniskillen and James Yourell, A. J. Pilkington and J. J. Ham turned out winners in Tullamore.¹⁹⁰ At Carrickmacross, county Monaghan in August 1901 all the races were won by Westmeath owned horses.¹⁹¹ As can be seen from Table 17 Westmeath owners won an average of forty-one races annually and collected between 3 and 6.5 per cent of total national prize-money available.

The size of this racing community and the number of farmers involved were influenced by a number of factors. The central location of the county, with its well-developed rail network, provided easy access to race meets nationally. Secondly, as documented earlier, numerous small local meets were an important part of the racing culture of the county and these provided farmers with an opportunity to participate in racing and some progressed from the local scene to the national one. The hunt club promoted races also presented farmers with an opportunity to become involved. Thirdly, the decision made in 1887, by the MFH Lord Greville to allow *bona fide* farmers to become members of the Westmeath Hunt Club provided farmers with

¹⁸⁸ *Against the odds*, 208-9.

¹⁸⁹ *WG*, 18 May 1896.

¹⁹⁰ *WG*, 18 May 1900.

¹⁹¹ *WG*, 18 Aug. 1901.

access to additional steeplechases that were confined to 'horses regularly hunted'. This improved their opportunity to compete nationally. F.W. Mitchell, in particular would have benefited from this decision. Finally, the specialist agricultural economy of the county also helped to support those interested in racing. The importance of the profitable grazing activity in Westmeath has been outlined in the introduction. Farmers involved in racing had substantial holdings of high value land and used grazing generated profit to support their racing activities.

Motives for ownership

There were many reasons why people became involved in horse racing, both social and economic. The main economic motive was to generate a profit and this could be achieved through the ownership of enclosed racecourses, ownership of racehorses and ownership of breeding stock.¹⁹² Making money from horse racing was a difficult business. Added to the initial cost of animal purchase were what Vamplew terms the running costs of horse ownership. These included training bills, entry fees and forfeits, bookage fees, feeding stuffs, veterinary accounts, stabling costs at the course and at home, purchase of equipment and as Vamplew suggests 'for some owners the list must have seemed endless'.¹⁹³ Owners hoped to recoup some of their investment by collecting prize-money, by gambling or by the sale of a successful or promising horse. The level of prize-money available in Ireland increased by 55 *per cent* from £39,524 in 1890 to £61,324 in 1902 but declined between 1903-5. The figures are illustrated in Appendix 5 and are accompanied by the calculation of the average prize-money available per horse competing. Vamplew concludes from his study of English racing that it was virtually impossible for owners to earn a regular profit on their activities and even of those owners who won large amounts, few did so consistently.¹⁹⁴ This conclusion is reached for an area where average prize-money was significantly higher than that available to the Irish or Westmeath owner.¹⁹⁵ Harry Sargent, in a contribution to the *Sportsman* reproduced in *Sport* in December 1894,

¹⁹² Vamplew, *Pay up*, 100.

¹⁹³ *Ibid*, 104.

¹⁹⁴ Vamplew, *Pay up*, 103-8, see also Huggins, *Flat racing*, 52-3 for the expense involved in racing.

¹⁹⁵ In 1890, for example the average prize-money available per horse racing in Britain was £213 compared to £36 in Ireland; this differential was continued to 1905 and although the difference was reduced from £149 to £47, the average Irish prize-money available was still extremely small.

outlined the cost of owning, training and racing in Ireland in 1891.¹⁹⁶ Sargent calculated that to own and maintain a racehorse in Ireland and race him once would cost an owner approximately £96 annually. Based on these calculations the Irish owner, who depended solely on prize-money, had very little chance of returning a profit in a country where the average prize-money available per horse that raced between 1890-1905 amounted to £37 16s.

The Westmeath owner who depended on prize-money to support his racing activities was likely to have been involved in a loss-making enterprise. Table 17 illustrates the annual prize-money won by Westmeath owners for selected years. The average annual winnings by selected owners amounted to £45 15s and falls well short of Sargent's estimate, although the leading money winner for each year would have surpassed the figure. Inconsistency of performance also contributed to the difficulties of earning profits regularly. J. H. Locke was one of only three owners nationally in 1898 to win a four-figure sum when his winnings amounted to £1084.¹⁹⁷ Locke's Westmeath fellow-owners, who were chiefly involved in steeplechasing, competed far more often to win significantly lesser prize-money. F. W. Mitchell achieved winnings of £289 in 1892 with thirteen victories; J. Cole's most successful season was in 1896 when he collected £385 for five winning races whilst J. Yourell's twelve victories in 1894 earned him £298. The conclusion from this analysis is that Westmeath owners who competed nationally in racing were unlikely to have returned consistent profits. Horse racing was an economically irrational pursuit with ownership positioned towards the consumption rather than the investment sector of the racing spectrum. In many cases this consumption was conspicuous.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ *Sport*, 15 Dec. 1894.

¹⁹⁷ *Irish Field*, 12 Nov. 1898.

¹⁹⁸ Wray Vamplew, 'Horse-Racing', in Tony Mason (ed.), *Sport in Britain: a social history*, Cambridge, 1989, 227-8.

	Winning owners	Number of wins	Total prize-money (£.s.d.)	Average win per race (£.s.d.)
1892	9	36	1284	35.13.2
1894	10	30	1266	42.4.0
1895	21	42	2008.12.6	47.16.6
1896	18	43	1544.15.0	35.18.4
1897	23	44	2773	63.0.2
1898	19	40	2299.5.3	57.9.8
1899	16	44	1451	32.19.3
1900	18	43	1377.5.0	32.0.5
1901	19	39	1303.15.0	33.8.5
1902	17	33	1513	45.16.9
1903	21	55	3937.17.0	71.11.11
1904	22	49	2502.15.0	51.1.6

Source: *Westmeath Guardian*; *The Irish Field*.

Table 17: Numbers of wins and average prize-money won by Westmeath owners in selected years.

People involved themselves in racing for non-monetary motives also. Land-ownership and position in society were closely linked and, for the gentry, ownership of horses and attendance at meetings reinforced their position in the social hierarchy. Some wealthy individuals racehorse ownership and breeding was an expensive hobby. For many landed owners the glory and prestige associated with winning races was always important.¹⁹⁹ For others the appeal lay in betting and according to Huggins ‘unless an owner betted on a grand scale he could scarcely hope to train and run horses without being seriously out of pocket’.²⁰⁰ Evidence of the gambling habits of Westmeath owners is scarce but there is one example of a member of an aristocratic family rapidly dissipating his fortune by injudicious gambling.²⁰¹

Involvement in racing enhanced social status. For the successful farmer-grazier it was a form of conspicuous consumption that provided the entry into an elite social world and confirmed economic status. ‘The excitements and uncertainties of ownership and associations with the famous and infamous had their own rewards’.²⁰² A love of

¹⁹⁹ Huggins, *Flat racing*, 51-2.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 54-60.

²⁰¹ *Leicester Weekly Post*, 25 May 1878. At a bankruptcy court Sir Walter Nugent explained how he had lost £60,000 through gambling and that it had cost him ‘a great deal more by borrowing’.

²⁰² Huggins, *Flat racing*, 79-80.

horses, the excitement of competing and the pride of winning in the rugged sport that was steeplechasing underpinned these considerations.

Conclusion

The impact of codification is a recurring theme of this study and its impact on racing was crucial. Order, rules and regulations and the development of a national controlling body brought about greater standardisation. Course inspection led to greater consistency of standards in courses and safety for horse, jockey and spectator. As with other sports, the model adopted was based on the British one and the main individual in the promotion of greater codification, the Marquis of Drogheda, drew his inspiration from happenings in Britain. As shown in this chapter the participant base may have changed, over the course of the half-century, but the controlling body of the sport, the INHSC, was a self-perpetuating oligarchy composed of some of the leading aristocrats in the country.

In Westmeath, the organisation of race meets depended increasingly on the middle and professional classes at the turn of the century. D'Arcy's bifurcation thesis is well represented in Westmeath. The landed gentry dominated the directorate of the Westmeath Racing Company Limited but its shareholders were substantially drawn from the middle-classes. Race meets in Moate, Athlone and Kilbeggan were organised by committees dominated by the business people and professional classes of these towns. The main participant group, the landed gentry, became increasingly dependent on the middle-classes to organise one of their chief sources of recreation and conspicuous display.

The close links between steeplechasing and racing had become considerably diluted by the end of the century. An analysis of the 231 races held at Newbrook from 1890-1905 is indicative of this change. The category was still the most popular type of race held at the venue consisting of 76.63 per cent of all races. Hurdling was growing in popularity accounting for 14.72 per cent of the races whilst 8.65 per cent were flat races. Restrictions operated that confined entries in several races to defined categories of horse and encouraged entries from a wider group than that involved in steeplechasing. Races confined to maidens, to horses owned by farmers and tradesmen, to horses that hadn't won a minimum or maximum prize, and to hunters

regularly hunted with defined packs were part of the programme. These events broadened the participant base but also provided a more varied and interesting programme to spectators. Greater professionalism and the increased importance of the professional trainer were further indicators of this trend. The pool of steeplechasers was no longer hunters schooled over natural fences in the hunting field but was more likely to have been prepared by a specialist trainer.²⁰³

Racing participants by 1900 came from a wider-socio economic constituency than in the 1850s and 1860s. The changed economic circumstances of both landed gentry and tenant farmer impacted on the involvement of both groups in racing. The Westmeath agricultural economy was a specialist commercial one and the profits generated from cattle fattening enabled a number of farmers to involve themselves in steeplechasing. Westmeath had a very active racing community by the end of the century that included members of the landed gentry, the professions and substantial farmers. However there was very little involvement of women in racing; their involvement at the end of the century was peripheral, a product of family background and circumstance.

Racing, with the development of the enclosed course at Mullingar and the establishment of a limited company to promote the sport and develop course infrastructure became an industry, now part of the economic order, rather than part of the landed gentry social scene. Greater specialisation of tasks had emerged. Trainers were now a well-established part of the racing scene and jockeys were licensed professionals. Trainers were the most important group who raced horses at the June meet, at Mullingar. Their role had become increasingly important, according to Sargent since the early 1860s when ‘men have given up by degrees home-training’.²⁰⁴ They are also a reflection of the entry of men to the sport who had earned their money in business and industry and had no landed estate connection. These men could send their horses to be trained, secure in the knowledge that it was not the ‘pedigree of the

²⁰³ Munting, *National Hunt racing*, 31.

²⁰⁴ Sargent, *Thoughts upon sport*, 141.

owners but that of the horses that counted'.²⁰⁵ The list of those racing in Mullingar included some of the best-known individuals involved in Irish racing at the time.²⁰⁶

Organisers of race meetings faced the same practical problems, as did those involved in organising other sport events. Despite the social status of the main group involved, access to a suitable venue wasn't always possible, and the absence, until 1890, of a designated racing venue in the county, seasonally restricted racing. The development of a national controlling body made this factor more important as courses had to be sourced, inspected and approved, prior to the completion of the national fixture list. When a suitable venue was sourced in Athlone in 1897 and 1904 the most appropriate dates had been allocated. As a result, the organising committee was forced to abandon the intended meets.

Finally, point-to-point events organised by the Westmeath Hunt Club and its south Westmeath equivalent provided an outlet for the hunting fraternity to continue with their steeplechasing over natural territory and not over purpose built courses. Entries were confined to horses regularly hunted with defined packs and professionals associated with the sport were ineligible to compete. Only hunt members or those with family connections to hunt members were eligible to ride races. The races were a reaction against the increased professionalism of racing and in different context, replicated the amateur-professional divisions evident in other sports.

²⁰⁵ Smith, *The horse in Ireland*, 210.

²⁰⁶ The list included C. J. Blake from Maryborough; F. F. Cullen based at the Rossmore Lodge, the Curragh; Michael Dawson, Rathbride Manor, the Curragh; H. E. Linde, Eyrefield Lodge, the Curragh; J. J. Maher, Tara, county Meath; Denis Shanahan, Straw Hall, the Curragh; G L Walker, Balrath, Athboy, county Meath and Captain (later Major) Dewhurst.

Chapter 3: Commercial Sports, 1880-1905

Introduction

The last quarter of the nineteenth century, was a period that witnessed the development of a number of 'new' sports, in particular cycling, tennis and golf. Versions of tennis and golf may have been played several centuries earlier but it was only during the last quarter of the nineteenth century that the sports were codified and developed a formally organized club and competitive structure. The introduction and development of these three sports, within the county, will be examined in this chapter.

The analysis of three apparently disparate sports in a single chapter is done on the basis of a number of shared characteristics. All three sports experienced growth during the final decades of the nineteenth century. The commercial imperative underpinned the growth of all three. Tennis and golf to a certain extent were complementary sports in that there was considerable commonality of participant, an overlap made possible by the seasonal definition of each activity. The restriction of golf to the winter and spring months at this time facilitated those who desired to transfer from the manicured tennis lawns to the more naturalistic landscapes of the golf course. Social groups, previously unrepresented, availed of the opportunity to enjoy the sporting experience and in particular, these sports provided the chance for female participation, an opportunity that was availed of by a small group of women drawn from the ranks of elite society, within the county.

This chapter will examine a number of aspects of the development of the sports in the county. The introduction of cycling, golf and tennis to the county as well as the development of a formally organized club and competitive structure to cater for the sports will be explored. The financing of the activities will be considered as well as their role in the development of female participation in organised sport.

Early Irish Golf

Bill Gibson, in a 1988 publication, traced the early history of golf in Ireland.¹ He has shown that as early as 1606 the game of 'goff' was mentioned in Ulster and that a golf

¹ William H. Gibson, *Early Irish golf*, Naas, 1988.

club was active in Bray, county Wicklow in 1762. In 1852, the first modern version of a golf course was laid out in the Curragh, county Kildare by David Ritchie, who was a member of the Musselburgh club. The Curragh, predominantly because of its importance as a military headquarters, became the early centre of golf in Ireland but no properly constituted club was established there until 1883. Two years earlier, on 9 November 1881, the Royal Belfast Club was founded making it the oldest in the country.² Five clubs were established in the period between 1881-7 and in the next twenty-five years the game enjoyed a period of extraordinary growth in Ireland. In the 1880s eleven clubs were founded; from 1890-99, 116 clubs were formed and between 1900-05, a further thirty-nine clubs were established. Figure 10 below illustrates the number of clubs founded annually between 1888 and 1905.³ The game was also diffused nationwide. Only county Leitrim was without a golf club, and by 1910 this had been rectified with the opening of the Ardcarne club.⁴

Gibson has suggested a number of factors to explain the explosion of interest in the game in the 1890s. General factors such as increased middle class affluence, a settled period politically following the agrarian troubles of the early 1880s, burgeoning landed gentry interest and more specific factors such as the influence of military garrisons, investment by railway companies, diffusion by the migration of members of the religious, business and public service professionals and an upsurge of interest by members of the Dublin legal circuit were all seen as important factors by Gibson in encouraging the growth of the game.⁵ Only with a fine-grained analysis of the early clubs would it be possible to evaluate the relative importance of these factors. Unlike the many ephemeral clubs that catered for team sports, these clubs proved to be permanent features of the Irish sporting landscape: seventeen of the initial twenty-one clubs founded between 1881-91 were still active organisations in 1991.⁶

² William A. Menton, *The Golfing Union of Ireland, 1891-1991*, Dublin, 1991, 1.

³ These calculations are based on detail contained in the publications of Menton and Gibson.

⁴ Menton, *Golfing Union*, 49.

⁵ Gibson, *Early Irish golf*, 62-3.

⁶ Menton, *Golfing Union*, 7.

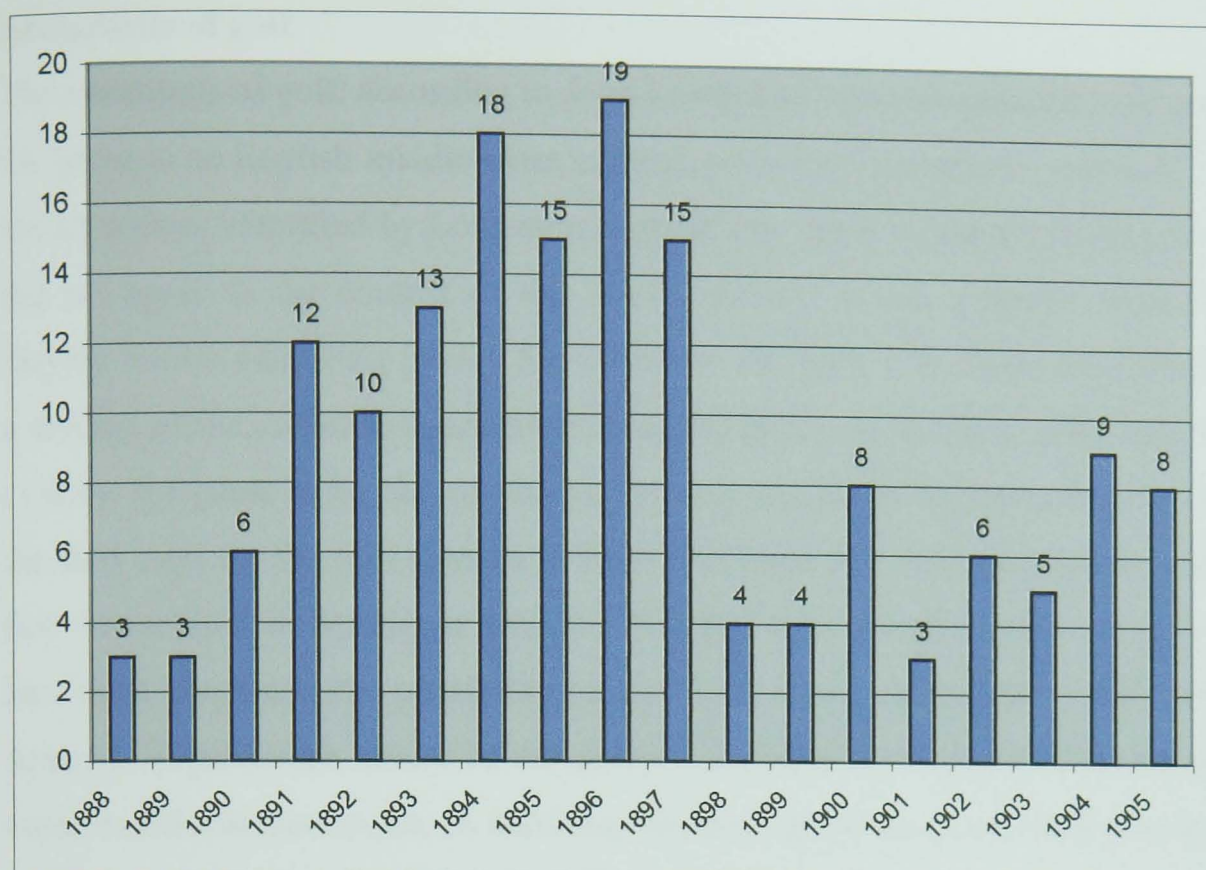


Figure 10: Formation of Irish golf clubs, 1888-1905.

The growth of the game required the establishment of a regulatory authority and the Golfing Union of Ireland, was established on 13 November 1891, at a meeting held at the Royal Hotel, Belfast and attended by representatives of eight Ulster clubs. The objectives of the union to popularise golf, to arrange championship meetings and to provide a universal handicapping system, were defined. The meeting also adopted a definition of an amateur golfer.⁷ The development of a universally acceptable handicap system engaged the organisation in much early discussion, a debate that was made more difficult by the variable standards of courses in play and the variety of terrain used.⁸ This concern impacted at the local level in 1900. On 2 September, the committee of the Athlone Garrison Golf club adopted the recommendations of the GUI that handicaps should be revised and accordingly golfers with a handicap less than five were reduced by two strokes, under ten were reduced by three shots, under eighteen by four and those unfortunate enough to have a handicap in excess of eighteen found themselves losing five shots.⁹

⁷ Gibson, *Early Irish golf*, 59-60; Menton, *Golfing Union*, 8-16.

⁸ Gibson, *Early Irish golf*, 34-9.

⁹ Record of Garrison Golf Club (henceforth GGC), Athlone, minute of 2 Sept. 1900, 147-8.

Attractions of golf

The attractions of golf, according to John Lowerson, who has examined the growth of the game in an English middle-class context, were both moral and practical.¹⁰ One of the attractions identified by Lowerson, a game that could be played all the year round, did not apply in the context of this study. Initially it was a winter sport with the playing season extending from 1 September to 30 April. The seasonal restriction was a product of the available space for playing the game. In summer, grass was too long to allow the game to be played and the grazing interest of the farmers with claims to the land used for the golf courses in both Mullingar and Athlone predominated. The first venue used in Mullingar was the Newbrook racecourse where the major June race meet precluded the possibility of golf until the summer season had passed. In Athlone, in particular, many of the golfers abandoned the game in favour of other water-based summer sports. In addition, the army personnel had a full programme of manoeuvres that left them with little time for playing golf.¹¹ Summer golf was introduced in Athlone in 1899 when eighteen members agreed to subscribe a sum not exceeding 5s. each to cover the expense of keeping the 'links open during May, June, July and August' and the cost of employing 'Sam Smyth at 5s. a week to keep the greens in order'.¹² The move was a success and in 1900 twenty-six members subscribed the sum of 4s. each for summer golf.¹³ The following year it was hoped to keep the links open without an additional levy but equipment replacement necessitated the imposition of a levy.¹⁴ Summer golf only became a reality in Mullingar when the club moved to a new nine-hole layout designed by W.C. Pickeman of Portmarnock, in November 1909, a development accompanied by an inevitable membership fee increase.¹⁵

Golf offered the combination of modest physical exertion with open-air activity, 'an idealised antidote for office-bound middle-class men'. Medical men championed the therapeutic value of the game. The game, unlike the manly games, could be taken up in mid-life and practised as long as the modest physical fitness it was claimed to

¹⁰ Lowerson, *Sport*, 127.

¹¹ Tom Collins, *Athlone Golf Club 1892-1992: 100 years of golf*, Athlone, 1992, 18.

¹² GGC, minute of 5 May 1899.

¹³ GGC, minute of 20 May 1900.

¹⁴ GGC, minute of 30 March 1901, 2 July 1901.

¹⁵ Hunt, '*Mullingar sport*', 17.

foster was maintained.¹⁶ The values ascribed to the game by Lowerson were the ones identified by Lord Greville when he addressed the assembled guests at the opening of the newly established course on the Mullingar racecourse, on 3 April 1895. According to Greville, 'golfing was an amusement as healthy as it was innocent'. The game would help to bring the people of the 'county very much together and had the advantage over other games that 'people of all ages could play it'. 'Cricket, football, and even hockey, debar people from engaging in them after they have passed a certain age; but such was not the case with golf'. The potential of the game to provide employment for young people was also one of its attractions identified by Greville. The game would bring large sums of money into the county, which would be paid to the boys, who would act as 'carriers'. Excellent remuneration would be given to the boys 'for carrying the instruments of which it would be necessary to carry a large number in playing the game'.¹⁷

Part of the games attraction was the tripartite nature of the challenge it presented to the individual participant and the structure of achievement that was integral to the game. It offered competition against one's opponents, against one's previous best performance and against 'bogey', 'the abstract notion of perfection on any given course'.¹⁸ Sociability, in the context of competition, also defined the essence of the sport. A competitive formula that embraced the concept of gender specific and gender-mixed four-balls played at a relaxed and leisured pace promoted social intercourse.

Introduction of golf to Westmeath

Four golf clubs were established in the county during the period of this study. The folklore associated with the Mullingar golf club is specific on how golf was introduced. The explanation is clichéd and simplistic and was outlined by David Walsh in a recent publication on the history of the club. According to Walsh, the introduction of the game was simple and straightforward. P. J. Nooney visited

¹⁶ Lowerson, *Sport*, 127.

¹⁷ *WG*, 5 April 1895.

¹⁸ John Lowerson, 'Golf', in Tony Mason (ed.), *Sport in Britain: a social history*, Cambridge, 1989, 189.

Scotland in 1890 and returned with the game.¹⁹ Contemporary reportage is at odds with this version of the story. The *Westmeath Guardian* makes no reference to Nooney's presence at either the initial meeting when it was decided to establish a club nor is he recorded as being present at the opening ceremony.²⁰ Neither was he part of the community of the founder members. At the opening ceremony, it was the RIC district inspector, A.E. Triscott who was identified as 'one of the prime movers in introducing the game into the district'.²¹

The founding members of the Mullingar golf club were members of the elite of county society. The fifteen who attended the initial meeting of the club were drawn from a limited number of socio-economic groups. The aristocracy and landed gentry were represented by Lord Greville, H. A. S. Upton, Col. Smyth and Mr Delamere; county administrators present included the resident magistrate, Major O'Brien as well as the county inspector and A.E. Triscott, district inspector of the RIC. Mr Montague Barnes, the sub-sheriff also attended, as did three members of the medical profession including Surgeon-Major Osbourne of the military. Commercial men present included the managers of the Bank of Ireland and the Ulster Bank, Mr Lyndon and Mr Lucas respectively. The presence of many who were also associated with the Mullingar based tennis club would suggest that these individuals perceived golf as a means of extending their recreationally based social networks, to the golf course, over the winter months.

Commercial considerations may have had some role to play in introducing the game to Mullingar. Lord Greville was the patron of the club but he was also a director of the Westmeath Racing Company Limited. The introduction of golf may have been seen as an additional opportunity to generate revenue by extending the usage of the racecourse over the winter months. The club was initially successful and 'advanced with rapid strides in the favour of the people of the town and district and each season had seen an increase in the number of the patrons of the links'.²² An increase in

¹⁹ David Walsh, *Mullingar Golf Club: the first 100 years*, Mullingar, 1994, 9. The story is remarkably similar to the folklore associated with the introduction of association football to Ireland in 1878 when J.A. McAleery, the manager of a gentleman's outfitters in Belfast allegedly became interested in the game after seeing a match played while on honeymoon in Scotland.

²⁰ *WG*, 5 April 1895.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *WI*, 14 Feb. 1896.

membership was experienced early in 1896 with the arrival of the regiment of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry to the town; the officer ranks of the regiment included some 'keen and experienced golfers'.²³ Their presence helped in the diffusion of the skills of the game.

The introduction of the game to Athlone is directly associated with its status as a garrison town. The Athlone club was of military origin, established in 1892, according to *The Golf Annual*.²⁴ The game was first mentioned in the press in November 1895 when the *Westmeath Independent* reported that a handicap golf match was played amongst the members of the Athlone Garrison club.²⁵ Only military and RIC personnel were involved. These included Majors Gaussens and Harrison, Captain Preston, R.M., Lieutenants Hamlin and Shaw and Mr Joy of the RIC. Initially, the game was confined to the army officers based in Athlone who were joined on occasion by the higher-ranking officers of the RIC.

After their formation, the fortunes of the two clubs in the main urban centres experienced contrast in the social composition of membership. The Mullingar based club evolved from one that was initially civilian dominated to one in which the military were more important and formed an important core of the playing membership at the period of conclusion of this study. The decline of military influence accompanied by increased civilian importance was given constitutional recognition in October 1904 when the Athlone Garrison Golf Club was re-constituted and Athlone Golf Club established. The changeover was made because it was felt that as the club was no longer 'a purely garrison club, but being very largely composed of the professional and commercial classes', that the constitution should be changed and the committee enlarged.²⁶ This development was reflected in the composition of the Athlone Garrison Club and the Westmeath County Club teams when they opposed each other in 1904. The Mullingar based team included five army officers in its ten-man team whilst the Athlone selection was all civilian. The civilian members of the Westmeath team included Dr. Gibbon, W. C. McCullough, the Presbyterian Minister, two members of the banking community, J. H. Long and E.C. Fitzpatrick, and W. T.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ *The Golf annual*, 1896.

²⁵ *WG*, 23 Nov. 1895

²⁶ *WI*, 22 Oct. 1904.

Shaw, a leading member of the Mullingar retail community.²⁷ The sixteen who competed for the captain's prize at Mullingar, in 1904, included eight military personnel.²⁸

The third club formed was that of Moate. The 'links were developed along a line of gravel hills adjacent to the town' and were opened in 1900. Members of the landed gentry dominated the main offices with Charles O' Donoghue, President and H. A. S. Upton, the captain.²⁹ Upton was a member of the three clubs. He was one of the founding members of the Westmeath Club at Mullingar and was also a member and delegate to the Golfing Union of Ireland for the Athlone Club.³⁰ Upton's demesne was located at Coolatore, near Moate and this central location made it possible for him to enjoy golf at all three Westmeath clubs. Upton was involved in the early development of the game in Dublin and had been a member of the Leinster team that participated in the first inter-provincial match organised by the GUI in April 1896.³¹ 'Pat' writing in the *Irish Golfer* in November 1899, on the leading players in the province commented that 'for his mechanical precision, consistency and grace, H.A.S. Upton is inimitable'.³²

A second golf club was established in the Mullingar area in 1902. This was a private club, based at Tudenham, on the demesne of C.L. Tottenham. The club was reported to have twenty-five members. Tottenham also placed a house at the disposal of the members where on Saturdays 'teas were given' by some of the lady members. This was a nine-hole course and the *Westmeath Guardian* reported that it was hoped 'after a little more practice to organise competitions'. Unfortunately, this was the only newspaper report on this particular club.³³

Course development

The idealised image of the golf course as an oasis of tranquillity and sylvan splendour, and the clubhouse as a bastion of elite sociability and business networking,

²⁷ *WG*, 25 March 1904. M.R. 31 March 1904.

²⁸ *WG*, 29 April 1904.

²⁹ *The Irish golfer*, 23 Jan. 1901.

³⁰ GGC, minute of 2 Sept. 1900.

³¹ Menton, *Golfing Union*, Appendix, X. 336.

³² *The Irish Golfer*, 8 Nov. 1899.

³³ *WG*, 3 Jan. 1902.

was far from the reality, in the initial development of golf in Westmeath. The early golf clubs in the county were challenged to maintain and develop the space required to play the game. The Athlone Club enjoyed a stability of base over the period of this study but by contrast the Mullingar club's experience was a peripatetic one. The officers of the Athlone Garrison Club developed their course on an area of ground known as the Batteries. The ground was composed of a number of gun emplacements and magazines, constructed for defensive purposes, on an area of high ground to the west of the town. The Batteries were abandoned in the 1860s when the introduction of long ranged rifled guns rendered them obsolete and the land was used by local people, as commonage, for the grazing of cattle and sheep.³⁴ A course was laid out that fully occupied the area of the Batteries and this was later extended into some adjoining fields.³⁵ The course was a nine hole one and according to the *Golfing Annual* of 1896 it was 'a difficult course being around an old fortification. The hazards are walls, moats, ditches, roads and railways.'³⁶

The reduction in the military importance of the Batteries led to problems for the golf club as gradually the lands were leased to private individuals and this meant that the committee by 1900 were paying rent to a number of different landlords. James Kilroy was the main landlord but in 1900 the club also paid rent of £3 to Guinness & Mahon, land agents for Major Lloyd who at this time was owner of a section of the course. P Macken joined these in 1901 and was paid £2 in annual rent, a sum that was increased to £5 in 1902.³⁷ A makeshift clubhouse was available from 1901 onwards by adapting a stone cottage rented from J. Vaughan at a cost of £1 1s. annually.³⁸ The members of the Westmeath Club were more ambitious and had a new club house purpose built on their Mount Prospect grounds in 1904 at a cost of £38 14s. 3d. Funding for this undertaking was organised by means of members' subscriptions, which accounted for

³⁴ Paul M. Kerrigan, 'The Batteries, Athlone', in the *Journal of the Old Athlone Society*, 1, 4, 1974-75, 264-271. The Batteries formed part of a series of defences along the line of the Shannon against a possible French invasion from the west built between 1803-6 and formed a large scale bridgehead defence of the bridge of Athlone. The invasion never materialised.

³⁵ McCormack, *Golf in Athlone*, 17.

³⁶ *Golfing annual*, 1896.

³⁷ GGC, cash accounts, 1900, 1901, 1902.

³⁸ GGC, cash accounts, February 1901, 96.

69.9 per cent of the total, and the proceeds of two musical concerts. The members' subscriptions included a donation of £5 from the officers of the Connaught Rangers.³⁹

Lawn Tennis

The modern history of lawn tennis can be traced to the patenting by Major Walter Wingfield on 23 February 1874 of a 'New and Improved Court for Playing the Ancient Game of Tennis' and his publication two days later of a set of rules for the game he termed Sphairistiké. A London firm, Messrs French and Co, dispatched large numbers of boxed sets and the newly defined game became immediately popular. A year later, the tennis committee of the Marylebone Cricket Club attempted to standardise a set of rules based on the various forms of lawn tennis. This committee had consulted Wingfield and included his hourglass shaped court in its code of rules.⁴⁰ In 1877, the All-England Croquet Club introduced tennis into their Wimbledon programme. There was still considerable variation in the scoring system, the size of the court, the height of the net, the position of the service line and the method of serving. Therefore, the tennis sub-committee of the All-England Club framed what were virtually a new set of rules, one of which introduced a rectangular court that was twenty-six yards long and nine yards wide with the net suspended from posts placed three feet outside the court. The first Wimbledon championships gave the new pastime a style and a status, clarified conflicting codes and lent form and substance to conditions of play.⁴¹ The game quickly became popular in Ireland with the Lansdowne Lawn Tennis Club established in 1875 and this was followed by the Dublin University, the Fitzwilliam and County Limerick clubs, all founded in 1877.⁴² The five yearly aggregates for club development are illustrated in Figure 11.

³⁹ Minute book of County Westmeath Golf Club (henceforth CWGC), 1904-1935, minute of 17 October 1904.

⁴⁰ Hiner Gillmeister, *Tennis: a cultural history*, New York, 1998, 172-7.

⁴¹ Helen Walker, 'Lawn Tennis' in Tony Mason (ed.), *Sport in Britain: a social history*, Cambridge, 1989, 259.

⁴² I am indebted to Tom Higgins, Sligo who is researching the history of lawn tennis in Ireland for information on the early history of clubs in Ireland.

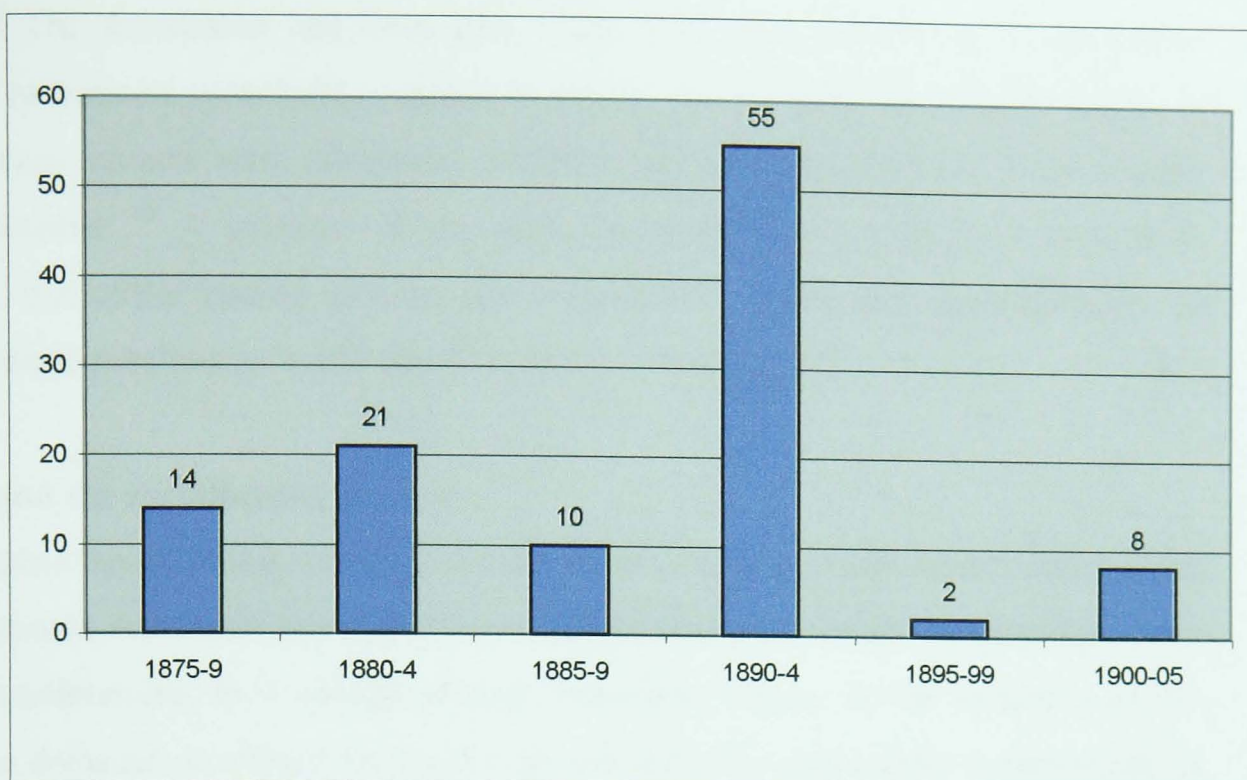


Figure 11: Five-yearly aggregate of tennis clubs established in Ireland 1875-1905.

The early popularity of lawn tennis in Ireland was a product of the simplicity and ease with which the game was organised. A lawn, a racket, a soft ball, a net, a pot of paint and an active member of either sex were all the materials needed for lawn tennis and most country houses could supply these essentials.⁴³ All the necessary equipment could be purchased and delivered by parcel post in one container. Tennis provided the ideal opportunity to country house residents to extend their recreational and social pleasures. It was the perfect game for the large gardens and lawns that were an integral part of the infrastructure of the landed demesne.

The croquet mania of the earlier decades meant that country houses contained vast areas of trimmed and largely unused croquet lawns. Croquet had declined in popularity. The game for some had become too complicated by the introduction of a set of new complex rules; for others it was either too simple or too sissy, considered to be a girls' pastime at best.⁴⁴ For a small investment the necessary equipment could be purchased and was freely advertised in the Irish sporting press. John Lawrence in his *Handbook of Irish Cricket* first advertised tennis sets in 1875 when a set of equipment could be purchased for as little as £2 with the most elaborate sets available

⁴³ John Arlott, *The Oxford Companion to Sports and Games*, St. Alban's, 1977, 534.

⁴⁴ Gillmeister, *Tennis*, 177.

for £6.⁴⁵ The foundation had been laid in the two years previously. A version of outdoor badminton remarkably similar to tennis was on offer from 1874 whilst in 1873 parlour rackets were advertised, which could be ‘played on the lawn in more genial weather’.⁴⁶ A measure of the early popularity of the game is seen from Elvery’s, one of the leading sporting goods retailers in the country, announcement of the wholesale purchase of 1,400 tennis rackets in April 1881.⁴⁷

Tennis and the socialisation process

As a summer sport, tennis was enjoyed during the hunting closed season and was far less expensive and much more inclusive in its catering for female participants. In its initial manifestation, as a strictly private recreation, played in the seclusion of the Victorian demesne, it offered female family members the opportunity to participate in gentle physical recreation and to develop their basic skills free of public gaze. The wings on the early form of nets used on court contributed to the maintenance of privacy (Fig. 12). That this exercise might be carried out in the company of invited male guests, in a supervised environment, was an additional attraction for parents of young daughters.

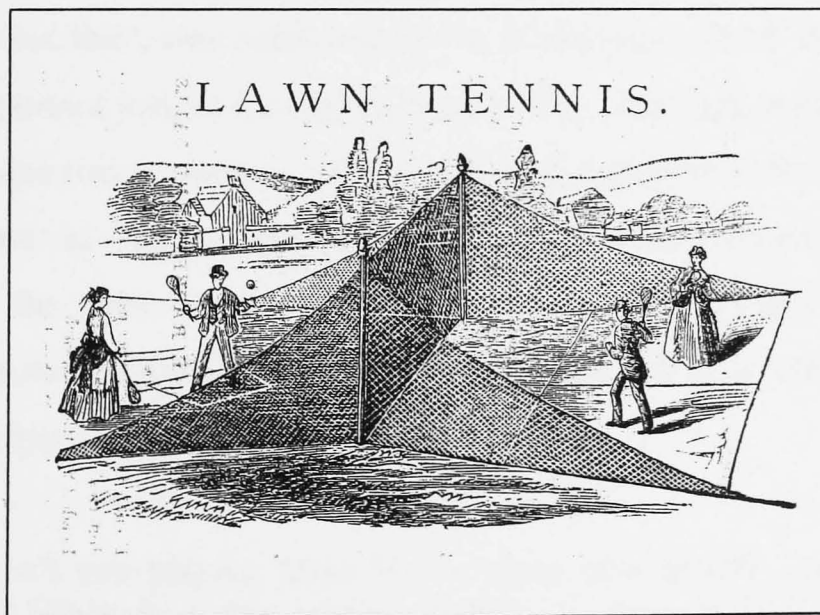


Figure 12: Early form of nets used in lawn tennis.

⁴⁵ John Lawrence, *Handbook of cricket in Ireland, 1874-75*, Dublin, 1875, 252-3

⁴⁶ Lawrence, *Handbook*, 1873-74, 230-31; *Handbook*, 1872-73, 261. John Lawrence also advertised his lawn tennis sets in the *Irish Sportsman* and in January 1878, a lawn tennis set that included four rackets, six covered and six un-covered balls, full size nets, strong ash poles with brass mountings ropes, pegs and a copy of the Marleybone laws and a brush for marking the courts could be purchased for £5. 5s. Cheaper sets were available from as little as £2 (*Irish Sportsman*, 5 Jan. 1878)

⁴⁷ Rouse, ‘Sport’, 14.

Tennis facilitated the development of additional tiers of entertainment to the social circuit of the landed wealthy and those considered to be their social equals. These were conducted in the public and private domain. The gaiety of Westmeath country house life was enhanced considerably by the presence of officers from the depots at Athlone and Mullingar. In 1890, Mullingar according to the officers of the East Lancashire Regiment was an area where ‘an incessant round of tennis parties were [sic] held’.⁴⁸

The importance of the tennis party in facilitating the quest for a suitable husband was given fictional representation by George Moore in his *Drama in Muslin* when Olive laments her isolation and singular position

I know that I shall never be married and the perpetual trying to make up matches is sickening. Mama will insist on riches, position and all that sort of thing... I am sick of going out; I won't go out anymore. We never missed a tennis party last year; we used to go sometimes ten miles to them, so eager was Mama after Captain Gibben, and it did not come off; and then the whole country laughs.⁴⁹

A deeply ironical, contemporary description, written by ‘one who has had a good deal of expertise in that line’, was published by the *Westmeath Guardian* in July 1887 and provides an important insight into the cultural milieu of the tennis party. According to the piece once one was a ‘swagger player’ it did not matter whether one ‘was a lord or threadbare curate’ as ‘society was above making these differences nowadays’.⁵⁰ The importance of the game to the courtship ritual is clear from the exchange that followed as the non-tennis playing guest was approached by a ‘swagger player’ and invited to participate

Why aren't you playing Miss M----- really you should; you don't play well enough? What does that matter, nothing is done without a beginning you know. Good players don't like it you think? I, for one should be delighted to play with you. This with a look meant to be trilling, but which had not quite the melting effect, one would have expected from his appearance.⁵¹

⁴⁸ *The Lilywhite's Gazette (Journal of the 2nd Battalion East Lancashire Regiment)*, 1 August 1890, 8, 8.

⁴⁹ George Moore, *A drama in muslin*, Paris, 1886, 328.

⁵⁰ *WG*, 8 July 1887.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

The rebuffed suitor is then heard to remark to his friend in reference to his partner's efforts in an earlier set, that 'girls who can't play should not make fools of themselves and spoil a good set'. At this particular party, the married women are specifically identified as the non-playing portion of the assembly for whom the party presented an opportunity for disseminating the latest gossip and social chitchat.

The last runaway match is discussed, the latest divorce case is not forgotten; old china, new dresses, pugs, servants, Ouida's last novel, somebody's character, someone else's personal appearance (whether 'made up' or otherwise), the new shape in bonnets, and the 'state of the country'. So it goes on. How can they talk so much! Do they ever stop to think?⁵²

Partaking of tea was an integral element of the tennis party but on this occasion a few indefatigable players 'who were evidently above caring for their complexions' continued to play. This negligence provoked the writer to suggest that for some young ladies tennis had become, in some sense, the new religion.

Ladies now a days do not mind any amount of sun when lawn tennis is going on (though really the heat in church on Sunday was something dreadful. It prevented many from attending morning service!).⁵³

Tennis spectating added an additional layer to the public summer social calendar of the elite of the county. The games became a focal point of social gatherings, particularly in Mullingar, where the army band entertained on a fortnightly basis; tea was enjoyed in the pavilion adjacent to the courts and guests had an opportunity to mix with their social equals. Unlike football spectating and possibly race-meeting attendance, where the featured sport event was the central attraction and where the spectators were active participants in the event, spectators at the weekly tennis events were participants in a social occasion, where the musical entertainment was at least as important as the sporting activity, and where social networking was facilitated in pleasant surroundings. Gossip was exchanged, deals negotiated, potential brides and grooms identified and matches made as the army band provided a background of classical music. In Mullingar, Thursday afternoons were devoted to public tennis events, and on alternate Thursdays classical music was performed by the regimental bands. On 1 June 1893, for example, the band of the 2nd Loyal North Lancashire

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

Regiment performed a choice selection that included ‘the celebrated intermezzo from Rustic Chivalry’.⁵⁴ On one notable occasion, it was possible to share with your social peers the satisfaction of having your own composition premiered by the military band, a distinction enjoyed by Mrs Loftus Lewis, when her waltz composition *Harmony* was performed by the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment band at the opening meet of the 1894 lawn tennis season, in Mullingar.⁵⁵ The music on these occasions was always classical. These occasions presented the conspicuous recreation of a comfortable community of like-minded people who shared the same social origins, beliefs, values, customs and lifestyles.

The development of institutional tennis in Westmeath

It is possible to trace the origins and activities of Westmeath lawn tennis clubs with considerable accuracy, as their activities were covered in detail in the local newspapers. The earliest reference to the playing of tennis in the county dates to 4 June 1879. This is found in the fishing diaries of Dubliner, George L. Adlercorn.⁵⁶ He spent a number of days fishing in north Westmeath and then made the journey into Mullingar to spend some time with Thomas Chapman at his residence ‘beautifully situated in a park at the edge of Lough Owel’. Having fished the lake unsuccessfully for some hours the men returned home and ‘from 5 to 7 played lawn-tennis’.

Tennis quickly made the transition from a private to a public recreation, a development that was facilitated by the formation of ‘publicly’ accessible clubs. The two main clubs were located in the urban centres of Mullingar and Athlone and catered specifically for those involved in local administration, members of the local landed gentry, the higher status professionals and officers from the locally based regiments. In Athlone, the Garden Vale club was dominant from the time of its formation in 1884 and achieved some national distinction through the performances of one of its lady members.⁵⁷ The club had as its core membership some of the leading establishment figures in the district. F.T. Dames-Longworth, Lord Lieutenant, and one of the leading gentry figures in the county, held the presidency of the club,

⁵⁴ *WG*, 2 June 1893.

⁵⁵ *WG*, 4 May 1894.

⁵⁶ NLI, Fishing diary of George L. Adlercorn, book number 22, Sept.6 to April 11 1880, diary entry for 4 June 1879.

⁵⁷ The *Westmeath Independent* of 17 September 1898 reported that the club was in existence over fourteen years.

until his death in 1899. Seven military officers and three of the area's main RIC officers including the district inspector, B.R. Purdon, who was elected secretary-treasurer of the club, attended the AGM of the club in 1889. The O'Donoghue who was one of the county's largest landowners was present as was Orlando Coote, the founding father of Athlone soccer. One member of the medical profession attended as well as a Protestant rector.⁵⁸

Attempts to develop a tennis club in Athlone for the commercial middle-classes proved to be less successful. A cricket club was established in Athlone in May 1886 that catered mainly for the commercial personnel of the town. Soon after its formation a lawn tennis branch was added. At its first annual general meeting, in April 1887, the club claimed a membership of sixty-four including nineteen females.⁵⁹ The summer months saw 'all courts occupied each evening with contestants of both sexes and much pleasure and healthy exercise was enjoyed by the members'.⁶⁰ The members weren't as fortunate the following year as the ground was under water for up to two months of the summer.⁶¹ The club actively sought to promote tennis and cricket amongst the 'employees in the different businesses established in town' by making available family membership tickets.⁶² This club disbanded and was replaced in 1895 by the Athlone Lawn Tennis Club with a committee dominated by some of the leading commercial men of the town.⁶³ This club had only 'a brief and uneventful existence', and Athlone's reputation as a tennis district was under 'the shield of the Garden Vale Tennis Club'.⁶⁴ In Athlone the authorities of Ranelagh School also promoted tennis. Newspaper reports make reference to the annual lawn tennis general meetings of the club attached to the school, and tennis was regularly featured at the annual school sports.⁶⁵ The game was sufficiently popular with the boys of the school to attract an entry of thirteen, for the tennis competition of the 1886 school sports.⁶⁶

⁵⁸ *WG*, 13 April 1889

⁵⁹ *WI*, 2 April 1887.

⁶⁰ *WG*, 23 July 1887.

⁶¹ *WG*, 13 April 1889.

⁶² *WI*, 15 June 1889.

⁶³ *WI*, 27 April 1895.

⁶⁴ *WG*, 8 Sept. 1900.

⁶⁵ *WI*, 14 April 1888; *WI*, 16 June 1894.

⁶⁶ *WI*, 26 June 1886.

The first organised club in Mullingar was established in April 1892 by ‘a number of influential gentlemen in the county’ who secured a field for the purpose at Annebrook, on the edge of the town.⁶⁷ The first annual general meeting of the club was held in May 1892 at the Bank of Ireland and a membership of 130 was claimed. At the meeting, it was announced that, because of the rapid advance made on court construction, play was expected to commence by 1 June.⁶⁸ A committee of twelve, dominated by members of the local landed gentry, was formed to manage the affairs of the club. Three of these held the position of deputy lieutenant at the time; the colonel of the East Lancashire Regiment, Col. Goodwyn was included, as was the resident magistrate as well as the deputy sheriff, M. F. Barnes. The manager of the Hibernian Bank was also a member. His fellow bank manager, R. Macbeth of the Bank of Ireland was treasurer and H. W. Lloyd was secretary.⁶⁹ The grounds of the club were officially opened for play on 16 June 1892, and by early August, the *Westmeath Guardian* reported that on ‘every Thursday lively games are to be witnessed on the picturesque ground’.⁷⁰ Membership had increased to 150 according to the report of the 1894 annual meeting.⁷¹ At the commencement of the 1894 season the club had developed four tennis courts and a croquet court and in July the game of badminton was introduced ‘and afforded additional amusement to both players and onlookers’.⁷² However, by 1901 the changed priority of the members was reflected in the altered facilities. Three ‘good’ tennis courts and two large croquet courts and one small croquet court now served the member’s needs.⁷³

The game was introduced to the town of Moate in March 1893 ‘under the most favourable auspices’.⁷⁴ The club was organised by ‘several of the principal families’ of the district ‘under rules similar to those at Athlone’, and a member of one of those families, W. C. Clibborn, placed a ‘field’ at the disposal of the members. The club claimed a membership of sixty at its initial meeting and elected a committee of six charged with managing the affairs of the club and developing its facilities. The socio-

⁶⁷ *WG*, 18 April 1892.

⁶⁸ *WG*, 6 May 1892.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *WG*, 17, 24 June 1892; *WG*, 5 Aug. 1892.

⁷¹ *WG*, 28 April 1893.

⁷² *WG*, 13 July 1894.

⁷³ *WN*, 7 March 1901.

⁷⁴ *WI*, 4 March 1893; 30 March 1893.

occupational profile of this committee was similar to those found in Mullingar and Athlone. It included representatives of the local gentry (F. W. Russell and W. C. Clibborn), the professional classes were represented through bank manager Stoppford Halpin and Dr H. Moorehead, and C. H. Winder, the district inspector of the R.I.C.⁷⁵ At the end of the first season, the membership of the club consisted of ‘the elite of the town and district, and many of the principal merchants and business people’.⁷⁶ In May 1893, the tennis grounds had ‘been properly staked off and all the appliances for the game provided’.⁷⁷ In Castlepollard, the tennis courts were located beside the polo grounds with Mrs E. F. Dease, secretary and the Church of Ireland rector, Rev. A. Drought, treasurer.⁷⁸

The Moate club trumpeted its elite profile and the contributed club notes to the *Westmeath Independent* highlighted the club’s exclusiveness. In May 1893, it was reported that the ‘club comprises all the aristocracy of the district’.⁷⁹ The weekly meeting of the club in June 1893 was attended by what was described as ‘a large and representative gathering of the elite of Moate and the neighbourhood’. These included the parties of the Maher, Wakefield, Adderley, Clibborn and Russell families, the district inspector of the RIC and the local bank manager.⁸⁰ In May 1895 ‘an excellent little pavilion had been permanently erected on the grounds’ and by October the club claimed to be one of the best equipped and most popular to be found in any provincial town.⁸¹ Image problems associated with the game had been overcome. Ladies gave the game so much attention that it was perceived as ‘too feminine’ and was identified ‘as an agreeable outdoor recreation quite unsuitable to male tastes’. The writer had seen ‘sets played that try the endurance and skill of a wielder of the racquet far more than the more brawny champions of the camen [sic]’.⁸² The prejudice that existed against the game was simply the result of ignorance, and the writer believed, that as the younger element became more familiar with the principles of the game, the likelihood of hearing notions about its ‘feminine propensities’ would disappear.

⁷⁵ *WI*, 30 March 1893.

⁷⁶ *WI*, 21 Oct. 1893.

⁷⁷ *WI*, 20 May 1893.

⁷⁸ *WI*, 13 July 1906.

⁷⁹ *WI*, 20 May 1893.

⁸⁰ *WE*, 17 June 1893.

⁸¹ *WI*, 18 May 1895, 5 Oct. 1895.

⁸² *WI*, 5 Oct. 1895. The camen [sic] was the caman or hurley, the basic piece of equipment used by hurling players. This game noted for its high skill levels and its ruggedness.

Voluntary associations also promoted lawn tennis. These organisations, an important element of Victorian culture, offered a variety of academic and recreational activities to their members and constantly sought additional attractions. In 1895, the Athlone members of the YMCA held an informal meeting to make arrangements for the establishment of a lawn tennis club in association with the members of the Young Women's Christian Movement.⁸³

Croquet: a revival of popularity

Tennis clubs provided the participants and support structure for croquet and as a result the game experienced a revival in popularity in the late 1890s and early 1900s. The Westmeath Lawn Tennis Club and the Garden Vale Tennis Club in Athlone both included croquet in their titles and developed their facilities to cater for croquet devotees. The Moate club had similarly extended its range by 1901.⁸⁴ In 1901, the Garden Vale club included three full sized croquet grounds in its facilities.⁸⁵ Earlier, in June 1898, the Garden Vale club promoted what was claimed to be the first open croquet tournament in 'this part (or possibly any part) of Ireland' and it attracted entrants from Birr, Banagher and Ballinasloe. The popularity of the game is evident from the numbers of both genders who competed in the annual club competitions. Ten competitors, including four females, competed for the championship title and sixteen contested the handicap singles.⁸⁶ Despite the absence of 'three crack players', Lord Castlemaine, Captain Dignam and Mrs Preston, ten players contested the confined club championships in September.⁸⁷ In 1900, six Garden Vale players were confident enough of their skills to compete in the open singles tournament promoted by the club, nineteen contested the handicap singles and a similar number entered the handicap doubles.⁸⁸ The following year twelve contested the open championship singles, eight the open ladies' singles, fifteen contested the handicap singles and nine pairs the handicap doubles.⁸⁹ In July 1901, sixteen players competed for the championship of the Mullingar club.⁹⁰ Inter-club matches were also occasionally

⁸³ *WI*, 13 April 1895.

⁸⁴ *WI*, 20 July 1901.

⁸⁵ *MR*, 18 July 1901.

⁸⁶ *WG*, 2 July 1898.

⁸⁷ *WG*, 1 Oct. 1898.

⁸⁸ *WG*, 1 Sept. 1900.

⁸⁹ *MR*, 18 July 1901.

⁹⁰ *MR*, 8 Aug. 1901.

organised with the Dublin croquet club providing the opposition in July 1901 for the Garden Vale Club and the social network associated with the game was such that the visitors remained in Athlone to compete in the open tournament.⁹¹

The popularity of croquet was such that it challenged the status of tennis in Athlone. The increased popularity of the game and its impact on other sports was reflected in an editorial of the *Westmeath Independent* in July 1901.

The older games and pastimes are ever changing to make room for newer innovations which in turn have to give way to still something more of a novelty. Cricket is not now much seen in many centres and tennis unknown to our fathers in the form we are accustomed to seeing it played is struggling for an existence against croquet, which in the most recent addition to out-door exercise. The uninitiated see nothing in the game but it was the same with golf and others. Croquet has taken a firm hold in Athlone and those acquainted with the detail of its play speak highly of it as a form of exercise and as a game of considerable skill.⁹²

The attractions of the game went far beyond the realm of exercise and skill. Like tennis, the game became a focal point of the elite summer social gatherings that provided a vehicle for conspicuous display of the latest summer fashion. Wednesday afternoon was croquet time at the Garden Vale club. On these occasions the 'elite of the entire district' were present as the ground presented 'a bright and animated scene'. 'Fashion with all its variety' was everywhere in evidence with 'many rich and beautiful costumes forming a pleasant setting to the wealth of feminine beauty'.⁹³ Afternoon teas were partaken amidst the glitz and glamour. Croquet allowed women and men to play together and enjoy a modest element of competition in a context that was essentially social and recreational. The sport required only the minimum amount of physical exertion; it placed little or no demands on stamina and as such was suitable for all ages and genders.

The growth in popularity of croquet that emerged in the late 1890s in Westmeath was typical of developments in Britain. Membership of the All-England Croquet Association increased fifteen-fold between 1896 and 1906. This expansion was

⁹¹ *WI*, 13 July 1901. Later in the month, the east Galway club provided the opposition.

⁹² *WI*, 13 July 1901.

⁹³ *WI*, 13 July 1901.

associated with a refinement of technique and codification of the rules. By 1904, the Associations code of play was generally accepted and success in the game became dependent on scientific precision and skill.⁹⁴

The competitive structure

A competitive structure to cater for those who wished to extend their tennis participation beyond the mere recreational evolved, initially, through the invitational tournaments hosted at the homes of the landed gentry, and eventually to the intra- and inter club events, as well as the open tournaments promoted by the local clubs that attracted players from all areas. An invitational tournament, that was claimed to be the first tennis tournament played in the county, was hosted by Robert Smyth, at his Gaybrook demesne, near Mullingar on 1 August 1888. The three-day event featured a ladies' and gentlemen's doubles, a gentlemen's doubles, a ladies' singles and gentlemen's singles. All competitions were handicapped, a system that allowed members to compete on an equal measure and this increased the attractiveness of the events to the individual contestants. The singles competitions, for both sexes, attracted an entry of twelve in each case. The integration of gentry and military society ensured that the band of the Royal Irish Rifles entertained on a number of occasions at the private invitational event.⁹⁵ Later in the year, a county Westmeath representative side was defeated by a county Longford team in a game played at Mount Murray, Mullingar, at the time the residence of the county Longford gentry couple Mr and Mrs T. N. Edgeworth.⁹⁶

These events, which were in essence an extension of the tennis garden-party, were followed by the development of inter and intra-club members events as clubs were established on a formal basis. The Westmeath Lawn Tennis Club hosted its first tournament within a year of its formation, an event that featured a gentlemen's singles and doubles and a mixed doubles competition. The report on the event carried by the *Westmeath Nationalist* suggested that 'the big and brilliant Fitzwilliam Terrace Tournament' which received 'such a booming in the Metropolitan papers' inspired the

⁹⁴ Cartriona M. Parratt, 'Athletic "Womanhood": Exploring Sources for Female Sport in Victorian and Edwardian England', in *Journal of Sport History*, 16, 2, 1989, 151.

⁹⁵ *WG*, 10, 17 Aug. 1888.

⁹⁶ *WG*, 8 Sept. 1888.

local club.⁹⁷ Although ‘many of the general public were conspicuous by their absence’ the social cachet associated with the game ensured that ‘a fair muster of aristocracy’ attended.⁹⁸ The social field of the membership of the Mullingar based club had a wide geographic range judged from the place of origin of some of the contestants. Players from Trinity Hall, Cambridge; New York; Banagher, county Offaly; Roscrea and Shinrone, county Tipperary; Boyle, county Roscommon; Newcastle-on-Tyne and the North of Ireland club competed.⁹⁹ The 1894 event attracted an entry of twenty-two to the gentlemen’s singles; twelve pairs contested the gentlemen’s doubles and nine pairs the mixed doubles.¹⁰⁰ Both the Westmeath Lawn Tennis Club and the Athlone based Garden Vale Club organised an annual tournament programme that included one intra-members tournament and an open tournament.

The desire amongst the members of the Garden Vale Club to maintain the essentially recreational and social dimension of the sport meant that the members were somewhat reluctant promoters of the open tournament concept. The initial attempt to organise an open event did not take place until 1898. The members of the Garden Vale club had a number of concerns about the hosting of such events. There was a concern about attracting the best players and some were unhappy at the idea of ‘throwing open the trophies to all comers’. Credible opposition had to be provided for the outside competitors. These competitions were not very popular with spectators due to the absence of the musical entertainment that was an integral part of a tennis presentation. On the occasion of the first open competition hosted by the Garden Vale club, it was specifically requested by the serious competitors that musical entertainment be excluded from the event.¹⁰¹ Like the initial attempt by the Mullingar club, this tournament attracted entrants from a wide geographic area. Competitors such as Fry, the northern Scottish champion, Clifford of Trinity, Perrott, the champion of the Lansdowne Road Club were joined by those from Roscrea and Galway.¹⁰² The

⁹⁷ *WN*, 27 July 1893.

⁹⁸ *WG*, 21 July 1893.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *WG*, 13 July 1894.

¹⁰¹ *WG*, 17 Sept. 1898.

¹⁰² *WN*, 22 Sept. 1898.

promotion of an open tournament also involved some financial risk. The 1900 Garden Vale open tournament for instance incurred a severe financial loss for the club.¹⁰³

Inter-club games were confined to two or three matches annually against clubs located within the region. The Garden Vale club played a number of games against the Tullamore club, beginning in 1888, with an event that involved gentlemen's singles and doubles, mixed doubles and ladies' doubles.¹⁰⁴ This game became an annual event, with the socially elite nature of the club clear from the composition of the team that competed against Tullamore in 1890. The team consisted of members of the Hodson family and Orlando Coote.¹⁰⁵ Games against regimental teams also took place. In 1891, the Garden Vale club challenged the Mullingar based East Lancashire Regiment and the locally based Athlone Garrison players.¹⁰⁶ In 1893, the Westmeath Lawn Tennis Club challenged the army personnel of the 2nd Loyal North Lancashire Regiment.¹⁰⁷

Competition was an important element in the golf portfolio at this stage. Internal club competitions were numerous and provided the members with an opportunity to test their skills against fellow members. Inter-club games were also organised but were generally confined to games against clubs in the local region. The first contest at Newbrook took place between the Westmeath County Club and the Tullamore Club. The game resulted in a fifteen-hole victory for the home club. The mandatory entertainment for the visiting team was organised at the County Club and the spectators were treated to tea at the stand house of the racecourse.¹⁰⁸ An annual home and away match between the Athlone clubs and the Mullingar based County Westmeath Golf Club was part of the competitive curriculum of these clubs. The series began in December 1896 at Athlone when the Garrison Golf Club was the winner by six holes.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰³ *WI*, 30 March 1901.

¹⁰⁴ *WI*, 4 August 1888.

¹⁰⁵ *WI*, 9 August 1890.

¹⁰⁶ *WI*, 27 June, 1 Aug. 1891.

¹⁰⁷ *WG*, 30 June 1893.

¹⁰⁸ *WE*, 18 April 1896.

¹⁰⁹ *WG*, 4 Dec. 1896.

Financing the Clubs

Although their origins were different and their strength varied over time golf, tennis and cycling clubs were essentially managed and organised in a similar manner. Members elected principal officers and a committee and these were responsible for managing the club's affairs between periods of election in a manner that paralleled the management of the Westmeath Hunt Club. Tennis and golf required considerable investment in infrastructure with the sourcing of specifically designated playing arenas and the development of appropriate pavilions essentials of the sports. Financial viability and the access to a playing field were crucial factors in determining the survival rates of sports clubs. Sports clubs in the Victorian era tended to be ephemeral organisations with an unpredictable lifespan. As was seen earlier even the club at the apex of the pyramid, the Westmeath Hunt Club, faced constant challenges to maintain financial viability. The three-gentry associated tennis clubs were financially secure with well-developed playing facilities and basic pavilions, factors that ensured their stability.

The development and maintenance of these facilities presented the main drain on the finance and resources of the clubs. The main source of finance for clubs was the individual subscriptions calculated to cover the running expenses for the year. Fragmented newspaper evidence provides some insights into the financial demands and investments made by the tennis clubs within the county. In 1887, male members of the Athlone Cricket and Lawn Tennis clubs paid 10s. annual membership and ladies paid 5s. Combinations of three ladies were entitled to a discounted family membership of 12s. 6d.¹¹⁰ The club, including its cricket branch, had an income of £25 16s. in 1886 and an expenditure of £24 8s. 4d.¹¹¹ The principal item of expenditure for the season was the payment of rent to Mr Curley for the use of his field. This was renegotiated down to £10 for the 1887 season.¹¹² The following season it was necessary to increase membership fees by fifty per cent to 15s. and 7s. 6d. respectively, an increase necessary because of the expense incurred the previous season in the erection of the pavilion. At the AGM, it was decided to purchase new nets, roof the pavilion, mark out some new courts and 'employ a man as a court

¹¹⁰ *WI*, 2 April 1887.

¹¹¹ *WI*, 2 April 1887.

¹¹² *WI*, 12 March 1887.

keeper'.¹¹³ The club was rather unfortunate in making this investment, with much of the work undone as the club ground was under water for over two months during 1888.¹¹⁴ Its successor the Athlone Lawn Tennis club was able to report to the AGM of 1896 that the club had no balance, no debt and a considerable amount of lawn tennis equipment purchased.¹¹⁵ This communal ownership of playing equipment was a common feature of some early sports clubs and helped to reduce the cost of individual participation.¹¹⁶

In contrast, the more up-market Garden Vale club reported a credit balance of £20 at its 1888 AGM.¹¹⁷ At the 1901 AGM, the treasurer reported to the members that the club was financially flourishing despite the severe losses incurred from running the open tournament.¹¹⁸ In Mullingar, a similar pattern emerged. Following the opening season of 1892, the committee of the County Westmeath Lawn Tennis club invested considerable finance in installing a drainage system and levelling the courts. A sum of £75 was paid to the labourers of Mullingar who were involved in this work.¹¹⁹ Court number four was completely re-made during the close season of 1897-8 at a cost of £34 19s. 7d. but the club was still able to report a credit balance of £10 18s. 10d. at the 1898 annual meeting.¹²⁰ The Moate Lawn Tennis Club also invested in their facilities and for the 1900 season had moved venue to 'a very nice walled in premises' on which was developed two tennis courts and two croquet courts.¹²¹

The organisation of the annual tournament presented financial risks to the clubs that were not always rewarded by returning a profit. The first such tournament was organised by the Athlone Lawn Tennis and Cricket Club in 1886. It was a week-long event for which a large tent was erected, refreshments served to visitors and the band of the Berkshire Regiment supplied the music, free of charge, for the occasion.¹²² Financial donations made by supportive patrons provided the main finance for the

¹¹³ *WI*, 12 April 1888.

¹¹⁴ *WI*, 13 April 1889.

¹¹⁵ *WI*, 29 Feb. 1896.

¹¹⁶ For a similar policy in cricket see chapter 4.

¹¹⁷ *WI*, 13 April 1888.

¹¹⁸ *WI*, 30 March 1901.

¹¹⁹ *WG*, 3 May 1893.

¹²⁰ *WG*, 29 April 1898.

¹²¹ *WG*, 20 July 1900.

¹²² *WI*, 28 Aug. 1886.

event. At the time it was impossible to promote a sports event of any significance without such support. Committees responsible for the promotion of regattas, race meetings, athletic sports and yachting festivals inevitably began their work with the opening of subscription lists for patronage. On this occasion, the tennis club attracted donations from thirty-nine patrons many of them also members of the club.¹²³ The levying of entry fees was also used as a source of finance. Ladies paid 2s. and males 3s. to enter the open events.¹²⁴ This initial venture into the world of tennis tournaments proved a profitable one for the club as a total of £22 5s. 6d. was received in subscriptions and entry fees and the sum of £20 2s. 2d. was invested in prizes leaving a balance of £2 3s. 4d. to the credit of the club.¹²⁵

Organised inter-club games were also a source of expense for clubs. Entertainment had to be provided and while tennis matches were organised in an alcohol free environment, teas were an essential part of the day's business. The Garrison Golf Club provided entertainment outside of the military environment. Included in their accounts for May 1899 was the cost of £1 3s. 1d. for 'lunch etc', at the Shannon café, for the Tullamore team and transport costs of 10s.¹²⁶

The organisation of fund raising events added to the social dimension of the clubs. Golf and tennis clubs organised concerts and musical entertainments that normally featured a combination of local and outside entertainers. The Westmeath Golf Club organised a 'successful and interesting' concert at the Parochial Hall, Mullingar, for 'the purpose of paying off such debt as yet remains in connection with the erection of the New Pavillion [sic] at the Golf Club links'.¹²⁷ The event offered an additional illustration of the integration of military personnel into elite society as the event was organised by Lt-Col Carpendale.¹²⁸ The concert raised the sum of £9 11s. and a similar event organised by Mrs Murray contributed £2 19s. 2d. The combined amounts provided almost twenty-eight per cent of the building costs of the clubhouse.¹²⁹ Concerts promoted by the golf and tennis clubs provided some of the

¹²³ *WI*, 31 July 1886.

¹²⁴ *WI*, 31 July 1886.

¹²⁵ *WI*, 28 Aug. 1886.

¹²⁶ GGC, 8 May, 17 July 1899, 54.

¹²⁷ *WE*, 12 April 1904.

¹²⁸ *WE*, 12 April 1904.

¹²⁹ CWGC, minute of 17 October 1904.

highlights of the social scene in the Moate district. The lawn tennis club promoted a concert in 1894 that featured vocalists, instrumentalists and recitation.¹³⁰

The hiring of professional expertise also added to the expenditure incurred by golf clubs. The willingness to invest in professional expertise was a characteristic that distinguished the clubs of the wealthier members of society. The Athlone Garrison Golf Club made such an investment in October 1898 when the committee sanctioned the hire of Ferrie, 'the professional to the Irish Golfing Union' for two weeks, at £1 per week.¹³¹ He was eventually paid £4 for his efforts in Athlone and travelling expenses of 13s. 6d.¹³² The Athlone Golf Club hired Sam Smith as a professional and green-keeper in 1904 at a weekly rate of 10s.¹³³ In January 1903, the committee of the Westmeath County Club announced that a professional had been hired from the St. Andrews Club, on the recommendation of Mr. Auchterlonie, the Open champion of 1893.¹³⁴ The professional, A Gourlay, arrived as scheduled and his earnings were partly governed by the number of lessons he delivered. He was available on the course each day between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. Lady members were requested to take their lessons as far as possible in the morning. Each lesson cost 1s. for a round of nine holes or an hourly rate of 1s.¹³⁵

The most important servant in the hire of the golf club was the grounds-man who was responsible for the maintenance and management of the course as well as a range of additional, fundamentally menial duties. The basic duty of the grounds-man at the Westmeath Golf Club was 'to keep the links in proper order to the satisfaction of the green committee' a duty that required him to procure 'any additional labour required for the purpose at his own expense'. He was obliged to be present on the links no later than 10 o'clock each morning for which he was remunerated at the weekly rate of 10s.¹³⁶ This wage was similar to that received by an agricultural labourer at the time.¹³⁷ He received a total of £13 for his labours in the course of the 1904-5

¹³⁰ *WI*, 1 Dec. 1894.

¹³¹ GGC, minute of 10 October 1898, 132.

¹³² GGC, cash accounts, October 1898, 26.

¹³³ *WI*, 5 Nov. 1904

¹³⁴ *WG*, 30 Jan. 1903.

¹³⁵ *WI*, 27 Feb. 1903.

¹³⁶ CWGC, minute of 10 July 1905.

¹³⁷ *Agricultural returns, 1901*. An agricultural labourer in 1901 in Mullingar was paid between 1s. 6d. and 2s. daily, 148-149.

season.¹³⁸ Cost cutting measures introduced at the AGM of 1905 as a result of a bank-balance overdrawn to the sum £19 9s. 10d. included the re-definition of some of the grounds-man's duties that involved him in even more menial duties.¹³⁹

The record book of the Athlone Garrison Golf Club includes monthly accounts for the period between 1898-1902 and these enable the detailed re-construction of the financial affairs of the club. The manuscript book also contains the minutes taken at each committee meeting held over the same period and these provide an insight into the concerns of the club over the period and the management decisions taken. Like many similar books the committee adopted a minimalist approach to compiling the official record of the club. The decisions made are minuted, but no record of any debate that might have taken place is made. The minute book and financial accounts of the Westmeath County Club also survive from 1904-35.

The first year for which a full financial record is presented in the Athlone Garrison minute book is for 1898.¹⁴⁰ In that year, the club suffered a loss of £6 9s. 6d. on the year's operations but began the year with a credit balance of £24 6s. 1d. In 1898, the club gained its income from three sources. Membership fees were the most important and accounted for 59 per cent of total income. Male members paid a fee of 15s. and females 7s. 6d. Twenty-four males and thirteen females paid the full fee in 1898. A variety of other short-term membership fees that ranged from one week to a half season were also available. Entrance fees for competitions and sale of golf balls were the other means of raising income used by the club. Payment of the grounds-man's wage constituted the main expenditure. He was paid a weekly wage of 12s. 6d. for a total of thirty-five weeks and a few part weeks that brought his take home pay to £22 8s. 6d. for the year.¹⁴¹ The club affiliated to the Golfing Union of Ireland and paid a subscription fee of £2 2s. for 1897 and 1898.¹⁴² This integration into the national system was extended still further in December 1899 when an entrance fee of £1 was paid to compete in the Irish club competition.¹⁴³ In October, a professional George

¹³⁸ CWGC, 1904-1935, CWGC account, 1904-1905.

¹³⁹ CWGC, minute of 14 Oct. 1905

¹⁴⁰ GGC, 3-36.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² GGC, 3 March 1898, 12.

¹⁴³ GGC, 30 Dec. 1899, 62.

Ferrie was hired and paid a fee of £4 and travelling expenses of 13s. 6d.¹⁴⁴ Rent of £5 10s. was paid to J Kilroy and £6 19s. was paid out in prize-money for the various competitions organised in the course of the year.¹⁴⁵ Maintaining a stock of balls (£12 8s. 1d.) that was available to members to purchase as well as expenses associated with club administration constituted the remainder of the expenditure.

The club endeavoured to maximise its income by making available different categories of membership and in particular attempted to encourage the short-stay army officer to become involved by offering weekly membership. In September 1900 a variety of membership fees were fixed and are illustrated in Table 18.¹⁴⁶

Category	Cost
Gentlemen	£1 5s.
Ladies	12s. 6d.
Gentlemen living more than 5 miles from links	£1 0.
Ladies living more than 5 miles from links	10s. 0d.
Monthly membership: gentlemen	2s. 6d.
Monthly membership: ladies	2s. 6d.
Ladies and gentlemen: one week.	2s. 6d.

Source: Minute book of Athlone Garrison Golf Club

Table 18: Range of membership fees available in Athlone Garrison Golf club, 1900.

The Westmeath County club based at Mullingar also struggled financially on occasion. The income of £50 12s. 6d. for the 1904 season was composed almost totally of members' subscriptions and included a group subscription of £10 made by the officers of the Connaught Rangers. Expenditure for the season amounted to £69 8s. 6d. The chief items of expenditure were the rent of £15, the grounds-man's wages of £14 2s. and a sum of £10 18s. 6d. paid to labourers.¹⁴⁷ At the annual meeting, held on 14 October 1905 the club was overdrawn by £19 9s.10d. at the local bank. Financial rectitude was paramount for the 1906 season. The services of the pavilion cleaning lady were dispensed with and the cleaning duties became part of the grounds-man's duties. The secretary, P. J. Nooney, considered that the amount of expenditure on the course was out of all proportion to its size. In 1903, it amounted to

¹⁴⁴ GGC, 31 Oct. 1898, 26.

¹⁴⁵ GGC, 8 Nov. 20 Dec. 1898, 30, 34.

¹⁴⁶ GGC, minute of 2 Sept. 1900, 147.

¹⁴⁷ CWGC, minute of 17 October 1904.

£15 0s. 6d. and to £8 10s. 3d. in 1904; Nooney proposed that a sum not exceeding £3 would be spent on the course in the 1906 season. Excusing the grounds-man from piloting the boat across the canal for members and having him devote his time to working on the greens instead made other savings. Instead a toll of one penny was charged to members using the boat that was now piloted by one of the caddies. The measures worked for the AGM of 1906 reported an income of £87 and an expenditure of £30 less. The overdraft had been cleared and the club was £10 13s. 11d. in credit.¹⁴⁸

The picture that emerges from this fragmentary analysis is one that supports the conclusion of Tranter on his central Scotland analysis of financial circumstances of sports clubs in that region. The more middle-class a sport's membership, the more stable were its institutions and the less pronounced the secular fluctuations in their numbers.¹⁴⁹ The tennis and golf clubs established in Westmeath, with one exception, despite the occasional financial trauma experienced, emerged at the end of the century, as stable and established organisations. Access to bank overdrafts, the ability of members to afford increased membership fees, the facility to organise fund raising events such as concerts, subscriptions sourced from benefactors, profits from organised competitions and financial retrenchment, if necessary, were factors in maintaining this stability.

Cycling

The cycling boom in the United Kingdom has been well documented with the peak of the boom years between 1895-7 when according to one commentator 'almost everyone who could afford a bicycle and who was not physically incapacitated rode avidly'.¹⁵⁰ The early history of Irish cycling still awaits its chronicler. The only historical work that examines the early history of Irish athletics and cycling takes a typically political approach to the subject and avoids any quantification of the growth in popularity of cycling and athletics.¹⁵¹ The *Irish Cyclist* magazine listed the affiliated clubs on its masthead for some years but this practice was discontinued after November 1893. The magazine documents a club growth that was rapid in the early

¹⁴⁸ Walsh, *Mullingar Golf Club*, 8.

¹⁴⁹ Tranter, 'Chronology', 379.

¹⁵⁰ David Rubinstein, 'Cycling in the 1890s', in *Victorian Studies*, 1977, 51.

¹⁵¹ Pdraig Griffin, *The politics of Irish athletics*, Ballinamore, county Leitrim, 1990.

1890s. In March 1891 fifty-nine clubs were listed, by the end of May seventy-eight clubs had affiliated and by November 1893, 107 clubs were identified.¹⁵²

Alternative indices provide some measure of the popularity of cycling. Information published in the census reports document the extent of the Irish cycling boom in the 1890s. In 1885, three cycle agents were doing business in Ireland and twelve agencies in total existed. In 1881, thirty-two people were employed in Dublin in the manufacture of bicycles and tri-cycles and by 1901 this figure had increased to 213. In Belfast 103 people followed a similar occupation and the total nationally was 704. In March 1901, an estimated 3,000 bicycles were bought annually in Ireland. These were English made but assembled in Ireland to create a sense of local identity.¹⁵³ Despite the popularity of cycling nationally, only one Westmeath individual, considered bicycle and tricycle making or dealing to be his main occupation in the 1901 census.¹⁵⁴

Cycling was sufficiently popular in Ireland and the available advertising revenue was such that two cycling journals remained viable enterprises during the 1890s. The *Irish Cyclist* was first published on 20 May 1885 by a Tralee, county Kerry printer, J. G. Hodgins and early in 1886, its editor, R. J. Mecredy, an outstanding competitive cyclist, purchased the paper and it became Dublin based.¹⁵⁵ Later a rival for the *Irish Cyclist* appeared in the shape of the *Irish Athletic and Cycling News*, which eventually became the *Irish Wheelman* and was amalgamated with the *Irish Cyclist* in 1903.¹⁵⁶

Cycling's status is reflected in the number of cycling events included in the programmes for Westmeath athletic meetings and the increased number of cyclists who contested these events as the 1890s progressed. This can be measured by outlining the experience of the organisers of the Streete athletics meeting. The committee acted prematurely when they included a bicycle race in their programme of

¹⁵² *Irish Cyclist*, 18 March 1891, 27 May 1891, 8 Nov. 1893.

¹⁵³ Brian Griffin, 'The wheels of commerce? Cycling agents and manufacturers, and the Irish cycling craze of the late nineteenth century', unpublished paper delivered at the *The state of play – Sports history in Britain and Ireland*, past, present and future conference hosted by the Academy for Irish Cultural Heritages at the University of Ulster, Belfast Campus, 21-23 November 2003.

¹⁵⁴ *Census of Ireland, 1901*, 72.

¹⁵⁵ Bob Montgomery, *R. J. Mecredy; the father of Irish motoring*, Garristown, county Meath, 2003, 8-9.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 9.

events for September 1892 as they failed to attract any entrants to the event despite the 10s. first-prize on offer.¹⁵⁷ The 1901 programme for the sports meet included five bicycle races, all of which were well supported (Table 19).¹⁵⁸

Event	Competitors
Mile Bicycle (Open)	8
Three Mile Bicycle (Open)	9
Two Mile Bicycle (Confined)	4
Two Mile Bicycle (Boys)	3
Five Mile Bicycle (Open)	10

Table19: Cycling events and competitors, at Streete athletic sports, 1901.

Cycling had sufficient profile in rural Westmeath in 1891 to merit the inclusion of a bicycle race in the Wardenstown sports meet, an experiment that was repeated in 1892, but the limited appeal is seen by the fact that only three competitors entered on each occasion.¹⁵⁹ The 1893 edition of the event featured a bicycle race that attracted an entry of fourteen.¹⁶⁰ In 1895, the Wardenstown Cycle Club had become the promoters of the event and the programme was extended to included three cycling events.¹⁶¹ The initial Crookedwood sports held in October 1893 included a two-mile bicycle race that attracted only two competitors, one from Mullingar and one from Raharney. Ten years later cycling was popular enough to warrant the inclusion of three bicycle races confined to those living within three miles of the village.¹⁶² At the 1898 Delvin Athletic and Cycling sports the three and five-mile bicycle handicap races attracted an entry of ten and eight competitors respectively.¹⁶³ In 1903, a bicycle race at the RIC sports confined to boys under seventeen years of age resident in Mullingar attracted an entry of six, while fourteen competed in the two mile, and sixteen in the five mile, open handicaps at the same event.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁷ *WE*, 2 Sept. 1892, 9 Sept. 1892.
¹⁵⁸ *WE*, 10 Aug. 1901.
¹⁵⁹ *WG*, 20 March 1891, *WE*, 26 March 1892.
¹⁶⁰ *WE*, 25 March 1893.
¹⁶¹ *WG*, 15 March 1895
¹⁶² *WE*, 4 Nov. 1893, *WE*, 23 May 1903.
¹⁶³ *WE*, 7 May 1898.
¹⁶⁴ *WE*, 27 June 1903.

The cycling club in Westmeath

The first cycling club established in the county was the Westmeath Bicycle Club founded at a meeting held in the Lecture Hall, Mullingar, on 20 March, 1882.¹⁶⁵ The club provided a form of organised recreation for its members, as is clear from the list of its activities for the month of May, published in the *Westmeath Guardian* of the 29 April 1882. The programme consisted of nine outings to villages and beauty spots, the longest trip being one of fifteen miles to the village of Kinnegad.¹⁶⁶ The activities of the club for June were also publicised but newspaper reportage of cycling activities then ended for a number of years. At this time the expense of purchasing a bicycle restricted the activity to the upper echelons of the middle-classes and in particular to business entrepreneurs and to members of the more exclusive professions. Members of this socio-economic constituency dominated the list of officers and committee elected to manage and organise the affairs of the new club. Their names and occupations are illustrated in Table 20.

Cycling in its initial manifestation in Westmeath was confined to a narrow group of commercial proprietors and landowners. Members of the former group were engaged in a novel but affordable form of conspicuous consumption, one that cost far less than a carriage or a hunting horse to buy and maintain. The ordinary or ‘penny-farthing’ was the chosen steed of these young male cyclists. For prosperous middle-class individuals cycling was an ideal form of self-expression, especially for those who wished to be the trendsetters of social behaviour, at a time when values were fast changing and active forms of recreation were increasing in popularity.¹⁶⁷ Minor participants were those whose occupation required some use of the bicycle, especially members of the military and the RIC.

¹⁶⁵ *WG*, 24 March 1882.

¹⁶⁶ *WG*, 29 April 1882.

¹⁶⁷ David Rubinstein, ‘Cycling’ 59.

Name	Office	Occupation/Profession
Mr Cleary	Captain	Bank official
R. J. Downes	Vice-captain	Solicitor
T. F. Nooney	Secretary	Ironmongers/hardware proprietor
J. P. Dowdall	Treasurer	Leather seller and seed merchant
W.E. Gill	Committee	Bank official
W. C. Corcoran	Committee	Bank official
Dr English	Committee	Doctor
W. D. Cleary	Committee	Publican
E. C. Fitzpatrick	Committee	Bank Manager
W. Canton	Committee	Publican
J. P. Vernon	Committee	
E. M. Mahony	Committee	

Source: *Westmeath Guardian*, 24 March 1882.

Table 20: Occupations and professions of officers and committee of Westmeath Bicycle Club, 1882.

The 1890s was the decade of the cycling boom when fundamental technological changes made the bicycle cheap and accessible to the middle classes. Firstly, the penny-farthing bicycle was replaced by the safety machine, which considerably reduced the degree of skill required for ‘piloting’ such a machine and dramatically cut the number of accidents. The safety bicycle had a chain driven rear wheel, which gradually became identical in size to the front wheel, a development made possible by the work of John Starley. Secondly, the development of John Boyd Dunlop’s pneumatic tyre of 1888 produced a product that was far superior to the earlier types of solid rubber tyres. Thirdly, the mass production of cycles brought about a considerable reduction in the cost of machines and indirectly established a second-hand market in cycles. As a result, cycling became a method of transport and recreation accessible and suitable to both sexes and most ages and presented an opportunity for improved personal mobility to individuals across the social classes. Mullingar residents had access to these advanced cycles in the early 1890s as can be seen from the advertisement of William Trimble of the Grove Street Stores in Mullingar reproduced in Figure 13. He advertised as the sole agent for J. P. Starley &

Co., described as the inventors of the safety bicycle and he also offered pneumatic and cushioned tyred safeties for either hire purchase or cash.¹⁶⁸

Notice to Cyclists.
PNEUMATIC & CUSHIONED-TYRED
SAFETIES on Hire Purchase System
or Cash.
SADDLES, LAMPS, ALARM BELLS
CYCLE HORNS, PEDALS,
Detachable Foot Rests, Spanners, Spoke
Grips, Steel Balls, Lubricating Oil,
Cement Enamel, Luggage Carriers
And every article required by Cyclists
promptly supplied.
ON MOST MODERATE TERMS
BY
WILLIAM TRIMBLE,
GROVE STREET STORES,
MULLINGAR
Sole Agent for J. P. STARLEY & CO.,
Limtd. (inventors of the Safety Bicycle),
The Meteor Works, Coventry.

Source: *Westmeath Examiner*, 4 Nov. 1893.

Figure 13: Advertisement of William Trimble, cycle agent, Mullingar.

The increased popularity of cycling in the county is reflected in the occasional newspaper report. In August 1894, according to the *Westmeath Examiner*, 'lovers of the road are to be found in every direction on Sundays,' in Mullingar. The *Westmeath Nationalist* reported in August 1896 that cycling had become so popular that 'people are beginning to look forward to the day when the possession of a cycle will be as much a necessity of everyday life as a pair of boots or a shirt'. The growth in popularity increased the possibility of accidents as happened to the unfortunate Mr McFarlan 'who met with such shocking injuries, as he was riding along the road, totally oblivious of the dangers ahead of him until he dashed into a man carrying a scythe on his shoulder, and had his arm almost severed from his body'.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ *WE*, 4 Nov. 1893.

¹⁶⁹ *WN*, 6 Aug. 1896.

A cycling club was re-established in Mullingar in July 1890, a time when even ‘the most unobservant cannot fail to observe the very large numbers of pedal pushers that pass and repass [sic] with such startling rapidity in Mullingar and its vicinity’. Almost all of the mounted gentlemen were ‘young men doing business in the commercial houses in town’ and these were the men who were the founding fathers of the club.¹⁷⁰ The club survived and in April 1891 the *Westmeath Guardian* briefly documented the general meeting of the club and published a list of the appointed officers and committee.¹⁷¹ According to the *Westmeath Examiner*

In the early hours of the morning on the roads adjoining the town may be seen several novices trying to become proficient [sic] and all under the able guidance of one well known in football and cycling circles.¹⁷²

The one who was well known in football circles was James Mulvey who occupied a variety of administrative positions with the Mullingar Football Club and who was secretary of the county GAA committee.¹⁷³ There was some overlapping of membership between the Mullingar Cycling Club, Mullingar Football Club, Mullingar Cricket Club and the Mullingar Catholic Commercial Club. These clubs attracted support from the constituency of the non-property owning commercial men, especially from the shop assistants and the clerks. Mass production and technological advance and easy payment terms, through the means of hire-purchase, had reduced the cost of participation and made the sport accessible to this class, who were enthusiastic club supporters and were constantly interested in new challenges and opportunities for self-expression, improvement and advancement. The Sunday outing was the staple diet of the members of this club and twelve members participated on the first seasonal outing to Killucan. J Henahan’s latest model ‘safety’ attracted most attention on this outing. The club was reported to have a membership of twenty-eight but the weekly outings were supported by less than one-third of the members.¹⁷⁴

The strength of the club at the time was uncertain and in 1893 the *Westmeath Nationalist* reported that there were about fifty cyclists in Mullingar but the absence

¹⁷⁰ *WG*, 1 Aug. 1890.

¹⁷¹ *WG*, 24 April 1891.

¹⁷² *WE*, 9 May 1891.

¹⁷³ See chapter 5.

¹⁷⁴ *WN*, 30 April 1891, 7 May 1891, 30 July 1891.

of a club was an embarrassment for young gentlemen ‘when pleasure or business’ called them away ‘for a time to some other portion of the country’.¹⁷⁵ Three of these ardent young cyclists were reported to have cycled from Mullingar to Dublin in ‘four hours and a couple of minutes’.¹⁷⁶ In September 1893, the members were experimenting with bicycle polo, an experiment that suggested that ‘polo on bicycles had a good future’.¹⁷⁷ The Mullingar club was still active in 1894 but disbanded in 1895.¹⁷⁸ Attempts to revive the club were promoted in the local press. The *Westmeath Examiner* in July 1896 lamented that ‘it was strange that in such a populous and central district as Mullingar, athletic and cycling sports could not be provided’. This apathy was remarkable as a suitable enclosed ground with a purpose built track was available.¹⁷⁹ A similar concern was expressed in March 1897 in the same journal.

Several towns in the midlands, of not half the importance of Mullingar, have very thriving clubs, and there is no reason why the young men of the capital of Westmeath, who seem to be always behind hand in such matters, would not at least pluck up sufficient spirit now and form an organisation.¹⁸⁰

A club was eventually re-established in the town in July 1897 and the Horse Show grounds at the Newbrook enclosure were secured for practices and matches.¹⁸¹ Shortly afterwards the club organised two five-mile races, confined to its members, on the track.¹⁸² In August, an inter-club match between the cycling clubs of Mullingar and Athlone was held at the same venue.¹⁸³

The occupational group most strongly associated with cycling was the Royal Irish Constabulary and it was members of this body that established the most stable club that developed within the county. The bicycle was promoted by the police authorities at the training depot in the Phoenix Park, both as a labour saving device that improved police efficiency and as a recreational tool. Members of the RIC were involved in the cycling clubs in Mullingar and Athlone in the 1890s and this involvement was

¹⁷⁵ *WN*, 10 Aug. 1893.

¹⁷⁶ *WN*, 6 July 1893. The three were Philip Shaw, Dick Rogers and J. Hope, members of the commercial community.

¹⁷⁷ *WE*, Sept. 1893.

¹⁷⁸ *WN*, 12 May 1894.

¹⁷⁹ *WE*, 25 July 1896.

¹⁸⁰ *WE*, 20 March 1897.

¹⁸¹ *WE*, 10 July 1897.

¹⁸² *WE*, 17 July 1897; *WN*, 22 July 1897.

¹⁸³ *WN*, 7 Aug. 1897.

formally recognised by the Athlone Bicycle Club in 1895 when both police and military representatives were appointed to the club's committee.¹⁸⁴ A designated RIC club was founded in Athlone in 1893 and reportedly had a membership of forty.¹⁸⁵ The RIC were active patrons of the sport in both Mullingar and Athlone providing prizes to the Athlone Bicycle Club and the Mullingar Cycling Club sports. The feature event of the Mullingar cycling and athletic sports, held between 1897-99, was the open three-mile bicycle race for the RIC challenge cup.¹⁸⁶ The *Westmeath Examiner* reported in May 1901 that the Mullingar Cycling Club was 'a thing of the past'. However, any vacuum that existed by its demise was partly filled by the establishment of the County Westmeath RIC Cycling Club in May 1901. The club exhibited a strong Mullingar bias in its officer list but some attempt was made to encourage all county participation by including personnel from Castlepollard, Delvin, Moate and Kilbeggan at committee level.¹⁸⁷ A variety of points of departure for the weekly recreational outings also encouraged geographical inclusiveness. In May 1901, for instance, the outings departed from Stoneyford, Rathowen and Mullingar.¹⁸⁸

Developments in Athlone followed a similar pattern. In 1892, the Athlone Bicycle Club claimed to have between fifty and sixty members and engaged in recreational journeys. On Easter Monday, the club organised an outing to Birr a journey that was completed in three and a half hours. At Birr, noted places of interest including Birr Castle were visited and 'Lord Ross's world famous telescope', was examined.¹⁸⁹ The 1893 season began, on Easter Monday, with a day trip to Longford that included a visit to Auburn 'the natal home' of the writer Oliver Goldsmith and guided tours of the Longford Barracks and Cathedral. Fourteen members took part in this trip that included members of Athlone's commercial classes and police and army members.¹⁹⁰ The following season opened on 19 March when thirty cyclists travelled to Moate where refreshments were enjoyed in Mrs Harford's hotel and on Easter Monday ten turned out for the run to Banagher, highlighted with a visit to Banagher distillery.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁴ *WI*, 16 March 1895.

¹⁸⁵ *WI*, 4 March 1893.

¹⁸⁶ *MR*, 20 July 1899.

¹⁸⁷ *MR*, 9 May 1901.

¹⁸⁸ *WE*, 16 May 1901.

¹⁸⁹ *WI*, 16 April 1892.

¹⁹⁰ *WI*, 8 April 1893.

¹⁹¹ *WI*, 24 March 1894

In May, fourteen members participated on the outing to Glasson and nine on the mid-week run to Ballinasloe.¹⁹² The next outing to Ballinahown Court saw the members entertained by the estate proprietor Charles O'Donoghue.¹⁹³ A similar programme of events were organised for 1896 with a journey to Mullingar where a social occasion, held at Kelly's Hotel, between the members of the Athlone club, the National Club, Dublin, the Tullamore Ramblers club and the Kells cycling club, was a seasonal highlight.¹⁹⁴ The captain of the Athlone Bicycle Club throughout part of this era was Mr John McCue who was employed in the furniture department of Messrs. Burgess.¹⁹⁵ His replacement as captain was Michael H. Foy of the Athlone business family.¹⁹⁶

The voluntary societies also organised cycling as an adjunct to their core activities. In early 1894 the Athlone YMCA organised a cycling club¹⁹⁷ The first outing organised by this club took place to Glasson with cycle related prizes on offer.¹⁹⁸ A ten-mile road race to Glasson and back attracted five entrants namely N. Lowe, G. V. Telford, S. Lowe, J. S. Vaughan and H. Vaughan.¹⁹⁹ A similar club was established by the Catholic Young Men's society and had its first outing in May 1896.²⁰⁰ The cycling club attached to the Mullingar Temperance Club organised cycling events in 1897.²⁰¹

Cycling clubs were also established outside the main urban centres. A club known as the Wardenstown Cycling Club (later the Killucan Ramblers) was formed in March 1893 at a 'very representative' meeting held at the Killucan dispensary. The club was typically middle class and included the local Catholic priest as its President, the dispensary doctor as secretary, and the national school teacher served on the committee with the local post-office clerk. Shortly afterwards, the club organised its first run of the season to Delvin and took the responsibility for the organising of the

¹⁹² *WI*, 2 June 1894.

¹⁹³ *WI*, 9 June 1894.

¹⁹⁴ *WN*, 14 May 1896.

¹⁹⁵ *WI*, 18 April 1896.

¹⁹⁶ *WI*, 20 June 1896.

¹⁹⁷ *WI*, 24 March 1894.

¹⁹⁸ *WI*, 28 July 1894.

¹⁹⁹ *WI*, 1 Sept. 1894

²⁰⁰ *WI*, 18 April 1896.

²⁰¹ *WN*, 12 June 1897.

annual Wardenstown sports meeting.²⁰² In 1900, the St Michael's Cycling Club was established at Castlepollard with 'all the drapers and publicans of the town sending representatives'.²⁰³

Functions of cycling clubs

Cycling clubs offered a number of activities to their members. The most important function of a club was that it provided an organised programme of recreation for its members. The recreational outings of the 1890s Athlone Bicycle club were well established and have been outlined above. These weekly outings attracted an average attendance of about one third of the members. This aspect of cycling was strongly supported by the writings of R. J. Mccredy. The *Irish Cyclist* in an 1892 editorial promoted 'the quiet potter through leafy lanes and shady woods' as an activity that was far superior and enjoyable to the rush of the 'road scorcher'.²⁰⁴ The latter

In his desire to annihilate space and time cannot afford to examine the scenery, or to chat pleasantly with his companions. The potterer jogs on, chatting cheerily to his companions, and enjoying shade and sunshine, wood and water to the full. There is little that escapes the watchful eye and he reaches his destination cool, fresh and in a pleasant frame of mind well satisfied with the days outing.

Clubs also organised road races but these were less popular and usually attracted only a few members. They also served the purpose of promoting the local cycle agent and, through his sponsorship, the latest innovation in cycling product. The Athlone Bicycle Club organised a ten-mile road race in June 1894 that attracted five members and was won by Sgt. Bacon of the RIC.²⁰⁵ The winner of the first race of the 1896 season was reported to have ridden a 'Griffiths Corporation' cycle supplied by H. Dagg, who presented a pair of Dunlop pneumatic tyres to the winner of the second of the season's races. On this occasion, the winner rode a 'Swift Popular' supplied inevitably by Dagg.²⁰⁶ In August 1894, a ten-mile road race confined to members of the Mullingar Cycling Club attracted an entry of seven who competed for the prize of 'a splendid

²⁰² *WE*, 16 March 1893, 1 April 1893.

²⁰³ *WE*, 28 July 1900.

²⁰⁴ *Irish Cyclist*, 24 May 1892.

²⁰⁵ *WI*, 16 July 1894

²⁰⁶ *WI*, 6, 20 July 1895.

field glass'.²⁰⁷ In the Killucan and Raharney district the cycling club in the area also promoted road racing. The Killucan-Wardenstown club organised a ten-mile road race over the Killucan–Raharney course but only three contested in 1893.²⁰⁸

Cycling clubs promoted athletic and cycling sports meets. The three clubs in the two main urban centres promoted major athletic and cycling sports annually and it was this role that established a civic importance for the clubs and impacted on the local communities to a far greater extent than the golf or tennis clubs. These were important spectator events that transcended the local and attracted some of the major national athletic and cycling figures to Athlone and Mullingar. The Athlone Bicycle Club promoted major meets between 1893-6.²⁰⁹ The Mullingar Cycling Club successfully promoted three annual events during its relatively short lifespan.²¹⁰ The second such event organised by the club featured one of the great athletic performances of the century by Westmeath athlete Walter Newburn, at the time a teacher at Claremont College, Dublin. Newburn was essentially world long jump champion in 1898 having won the AAA title in June, a title he retained in 1899. Newburn arrived in Mullingar in great jumping form as on the Saturday prior to the Mullingar meet he became the first athlete in history to long jump over twenty-four feet, when he jumped twenty-four feet and a half inch in the international match against Scotland at Ballsbridge on 16 July 1898. At Mullingar, he produced an even more spectacular leap, and cleared twenty-four feet six and three quarter inches. Controversy surrounded the achievement and the jump was never officially recognised as a record.²¹¹

The County Westmeath RIC Cycling Club became the promoter of the major non-equestrian related sports event, held in Mullingar in the early 1900s. A number of factors combined to ensure that these sports became events of national importance. The Horse Show grounds developed by the directors of the Westmeath Racing Company Limited included a purpose built cycle racetrack in its facilities and provided a quality venue that very few provincial towns could equal. The prizes for the individual events were generous, estimated to be worth in excess of £100 in 1901

²⁰⁷ *WE*, 18 Aug. 1894.

²⁰⁸ *WE*, 3 Aug 1893; *WN*, 20 Aug 1896; *WN*, 18 Aug 1898.

²⁰⁹ *WI*, 19 Aug. 1893; *WI*, 18 Aug. 1894; 3 Sept. 1896.

²¹⁰ *WE*, 11 Sept. 1897; 22 July 1899.

²¹¹ Hunt, 'Mullingar sport', 18-20.

and attracted entries from some of the leading athletes in the country.²¹² Even the novelty event of the sack race offered a first prize of a suit of Irish tweed, presented by Mullingar draper, Mr Joseph Kirwan. The appearance of quality athletes in Mullingar was encouraged by the centrality of the town and the accessibility facilitated by the rail network. Tom Kiely who won the Olympic All-Around event at the St Louis Olympic Games of 1904 competed in 1901, 1902 and 1903 and Denis Horgan competed in a number of weight throwing events at the 1904 meet.²¹³ He won thirteen AAA shot putt titles between 1893 and 1912 and was a silver medallist at the 1908 Olympic Games in the same event.²¹⁴ Walter Newburn made one of his last competitive appearances at the 1901 meet.²¹⁵ The association with the RIC and the active involvement of the highest-ranking officers of the force in the organisation of the event brought status to the promotion. The good order and management associated with the sports were such that the organisers were awarded the hosting of championship events, which added to the meet's attractiveness. In 1902, the Leinster long jump and three miles cycling championships were hosted.²¹⁶ Musical entertainment was an integral part of any sporting promotion of significance and the Dublin RIC band were recruited to provide this essential feature and the Mullingar Brass and Reed Band joined them at the 1903 and 1904 events.²¹⁷

Just as organising tennis tournaments placed pressure on lawn-tennis clubs, the promotion of open sports meetings were also financially challenging. Despite a reported attendance of several thousand at the 1894 meet, the Athlone Bicycle Club made a loss of £20 on the promotion of the event, a loss attributed to the difficulty in collecting gate receipts, as hundreds passed in without paying and the expense of bringing a band from Mullingar, to perform the essential musical accompaniment.²¹⁸ The challenge involved in the organisation of a major athletic meet was also demanding on the energy and enthusiasm of the members and may have contributed

²¹² *WE*, 24 Aug. 1901.

²¹³ *WE*, 24 Aug. 1901, 12 July 1902, 27 June 1903, 4 June 1904. The 1901 sports provided Kiely with an opportunity to showcase his extraordinary athletic talent as he was a winner in the hammer throw, the fifty-six pound weight throwing event, the long jump and the 120 yards hurdles open handicap race. He also finished in third place in the high jump

²¹⁴ Peter Lovesey, *The official centenary history of the Amateur Athletic Association*, Enfield, 1979, 48.

²¹⁵ Hunt, 'Mullingar sport', 18-19.

²¹⁶ *WE*, 12 July 1902.

²¹⁷ *WE*, 24 Aug. 1901, 27 June 1903, 4 June 1904.

²¹⁸ *WI*, 16 March 1894.

to the shortened life expectancy of the typical cycling club. The promotion of events such as the above occasionally allowed the relationship between clubs and patrons to become transposed as clubs became the providers rather than recipients of local patronage. The County Westmeath RIC Club became a provider of finance to local charity in 1901. At the annual meeting of the club in December a sum of £10 was donated to the St Vincent de Paul society, from club funds for ‘the relief of the poor of all denominations’.²¹⁹

Social class and the ‘new sports’

Empirical evidence suggests that the recreational opportunities provided by the commercial sports especially tennis and golf was extremely restricted. Tennis and golf were dominated by members of social class A but to different sections within this category. An analysis of the membership of Westmeath Golf Club and of Athlone Golf Club for 1904 indicates the extent to which members of the elite group dominated. The social characteristics of the membership of both clubs are illustrated in Table 21.

	Westmeath Golf Club	Athlone Golf Club
Social class A	43 (82.69 %)	29 (93.54%)
Social class Bi	8 (15.38 %)	2 (6.46%)
Social class Ci	1 (1.93 %)	
Average age	40.19	39.16
Average age: male	41.92	39.89
Average age: female	30.8	36.83
Religion: Catholic	21 (45.45 %)	8 (32 %)
Religion: Protestant	20 (47.72 %)	14 (56%)
Religion: other	3 (6.83 %)	3 (12 %)
Westmeath native	55.17 %	36.36 %
Non-Westmeath native	44.83 %	63.64%

Table 21: Social characteristics of members of Westmeath Golf Club and Athlone Golf Club, 1904.

Golf was the sport of the time-rich middle-aged professional. The Mullingar membership was dominated numerically by eight bank officials below the rank of manger who were classified as social class Bi and also included four bank managers, six doctors, five solicitors, six clergymen, six landowners and three army officers who

²¹⁹ WE, 7 Dec. 1901.

had opted for individual membership in addition to the group subscription of the Connacht Rangers. The Athlone membership displayed a similar professional construct albeit with a greater variety of professions represented. Based on the average age of participant, Lord Greville's identification of one of the essential virtues of the game as one that 'people of all ages could play' was fulfilled.²²⁰ Professional status, time and finance was the essential requirement for qualification, a factor that is reflected in the religious mix of the two clubs.

An analysis of tennis membership of the Garden Vale Club of Athlone and the Westmeath Tennis Club in Mullingar revealed a similar pattern of social class membership.²²¹ Membership of both clubs was almost totally drawn from social class A with one bank official member of Garden Vale and two clerks who were members of the Mullingar club responsible for the slight dilution of the social class of the clubs. Those with a landed estate background dominated membership of both clubs and formed 29.54 per cent and 40.42 per cent of the Athlone and Mullingar clubs identified membership respectively. These figures reflected the extent to which the tennis club was a public manifestation of a recreational activity that initially flourished in the environment of the landed demesne. It also illustrates the important role played by tennis in providing a communal social outlet for landed estate families during the summer months. Golf at this time was a winter activity that clashed with the hunting season and consequently was of little interest to landed estate personnel.

High-ranking office holders in local administration who were members of either the Athlone or Mullingar clubs also had strong associations with landed estates. Seven RIC inspectors were members of the clubs as was the resident magistrate of both regions. The latter were drawn mainly from the ranks of the lesser ranking country gentry, the professions and substantial businessmen.²²² Army officers formed 22.72 per cent of the Garden Vale membership and the combined membership of both clubs

²²⁰ WG, 5 April 1895.

²²¹ Tennis club membership was compiled from lists of those attending annual meetings of the two clubs, attending functions and competing in club competitions. The Westmeath Club list consisted of the names of fifty-two of those involved between 1892-1901 of which the social status of forty-nine was established. The Garden Vale list of seventy members was compiled of those active between 1889-1902 and the social status of forty-four of these was established. Wives and daughters were assigned the same social category as their husbands or fathers.

²²² Penny Bonsall, *The Irish RMs; the resident magistrates in the British administration in Ireland*, Dublin, nd, 88-9.

included nine Protestant clergymen. The Mullingar club included the managers of the four main banks in the town as members and both clubs included doctors and lawyers as members. A profile of the Moate club would have produced a similar social construction as the club boasted of its elite status and boasted of a membership that 'included all the aristocrats of the district'.

Tennis was closely associated with the Protestant Church. Only landed estate proprietors The O'Donoghue and P. P. O'Reilly, Bank managers J. J. O'Connell and V. Lucas as well as Dr Dillon-Kelly were Catholic members of the tennis clubs examined. The Mullingar club had a 91 per cent Protestant membership whilst the Garden Vale club was 89 per cent Protestant. Some of the key individuals involved in club development were also active at the organisational level in the Protestant Church. This association provided one of the points of contact for the personnel involved and this was extended to an involvement in lawn tennis administration. The Protestant community in Mullingar was particularly active at the time and in 1888 had completed the building of an impressive parochial hall that became a cultural centre for the community where touring opera companies staged their productions on a stage that was especially built for the purpose and concerts, plays, whist drives and dances were organised.²²³ The Mullingar Parochial Club and the Mullingar Young Men's Parochial Club were the institutions around which much of this entertainment was arranged. In 1901, an attempt was made to encourage young Protestants to adopt the game. The Mullingar Parochial Association formed a tennis club and a tennis court was laid at the schoolhouse in Harbour street, Mullingar.²²⁴

The 1892 committee of the Westmeath Tennis Club (Mullingar) included several who were elected select vestrymen for their respective parishes. Col. Cooper, chairman of the club and committee member, T.C. Levinge were appointed select vestrymen for the Mullingar Union of parishes and club secretary H. W Lloyd and treasurer Robert Macbeth were elected select vestrymen for the All-Saints Church.²²⁵ The connection had been solidified by 1901 when the Parochial Hall became the venue for tennis club meetings and the committee elected for the season included three Protestant

²²³ Trevor, E. Winckworth, *All Saints Church, Mullingar: notes concerning the history of the church since 1814*, Mullingar, 1989, 9.

²²⁴ *WG*, 1 June 1901.

²²⁵ *WG*, 1 April 1892.

clergymen. These included the parish incumbent Rev. Dr Seymour DD. He was joined on the committee by fellow clerics Rev. A. E. Crotty and Dr Hill Wilson White, DD.²²⁶ Montgomery Barnes who was secretary of the Westmeath Lawn Tennis Club had acted for many years as a member of the select vestry. He was also a parochial nominator and diocesan synods-man, the incumbent churchwarden in 1903, and was a leading figure in the organising of concerts in aid of church funds.²²⁷ The connection was similar in Moate with the parochial hall providing the venue for entertainment events organised by the lawn tennis club.²²⁸ Practically every male member associated with the club was also active in the administration of the Church of Ireland parish fulfilling the role of select vestrymen.²²⁹

The analysis of a sample of Athlone and Mullingar cycling clubs illustrates its importance to the lower middle classes in the 1890s. Forty-eight cyclists (66.67 per cent) from a total list of seventy-two were identified and their social status established. Participants from social class C dominated the group and in particular those clerks and shop assistants of C ii who formed 47.9 per cent of the total. Overall 20.84 per cent of cyclists were from class A, 14.58 from class B and 64.58 from class C. The labourers of class D were unrepresented and the average age of cyclist was 27.72 years.

The role of women

In the male dominant world of the Victorian and Edwardian era, the role of women was rigidly defined and confined almost exclusively to domesticity. The notion that men and women ought to inhabit separate spheres of existence was a fundamental tenet of elite and middle-class society. The public world of business, politics and leisure was considered appropriate for the male gender; for females, the private world of the home was the prescribed environment, where they would bear and raise children and provide a haven of tranquillity for men to retreat from the pressures of public life. In practical terms, this meant that sport in general and competitive, team-based and mixed gender sport in particular, was considered to be an unsuitable pursuit

²²⁶ *WN*, 7 March 1901.

²²⁷ *WG*, 22 Oct. 1903

²²⁸ *WI*, 21 Oct. 1893.

²²⁹ RCB, Vestry minute book, 1787-1965, Kilcleagh parish, P.0412.05.1 minutes of Easter 1885, 7 April 1890, 15 April 1895, 13 April 1900, 24 April 1905.

for women, as active participation threatened masculinity and femininity, as well as female domestic and procreative responsibilities. This ideology was sufficient to restrict women to a subordinate, minor and often derided sporting role. Therefore for cultural, biological and social reasons the functions of the sexes were to be kept largely separate, according to the orthodoxy of the time. According to Hargreaves, the impact of the separate spheres of existence theory was such that women's participation in sport 'embodied the characteristics of passivity rather than activity, subordination rather than ascendancy'. 'Women were obliged to show restraint, be refined and respectable, and confirm at all times the lady like modes of behaviour prescribed for them'.²³⁰ Those who sought social approval for their involvement in sport had to demonstrate that femininity and more active participation in physical activity were not incompatible.²³¹ It has been accepted that these societal attitudes were primarily responsible for the limited involvement of women in sport.

Participation in philanthropic activities provided the main opportunity to upper and middle class Irish women to enhance and expand their public and social role. Social work, normally voluntary, ranging from house visitation to work in prisons, refuges or workhouses was viewed as a legitimate public occupation. Women established a myriad of philanthropic societies and institutions to cater for specific perceived needs and these organisations offered women a sense of identity and community, as well as a sense of purpose and achievement and allowed women to play a role in expressing their concern for the less fortunate in society.²³² This desire was expressed in a sporting context, when a number of Athlone women were active in promoting and staffing a temperance tent at the Athlone races.

The introduction of table tennis to the county provided the means for combining sports participation and organisation as well as a commitment to voluntarism. The sport was the ideal vehicle for showing that femininity and physical activity were not incompatible. The novelty value associated with table tennis provided an opportunity for some gentry families to organise tournaments of both a private and public nature

²³⁰ Jennifer A. Hargreaves, " 'Playing like gentlemen while behaving like ladies': contradictory features of the formative years of women's sport", in *The British Journal of Sports History*, 2, 1, 1985, 43.

²³¹ Ibid, 46.

²³² Maria Luddy, *Women and philanthropy in nineteenth century Ireland*, Cambridge, 1995, 214-18.

for altruistic reasons. The Longworth Hall in Athlone was the venue for the first such tournament organised in February 1901. The purpose of the event was to raise funds for the Westmeath stall at the Royal City Hospital Bazaar to be held in Dublin. The event attracted an entry of eighteen gentlemen and twelve females and raised a sum of £10 for the charity. A number of events were organised in the Moate district. Mrs Russell at her Lissanode mansion and Miss Fetherstonhaugh of Grouse Lodge, promoted events. Mrs Barton of Mosstown promoted a competition that was held in the national school building in Moate.²³³ Mrs Russell returned to Athlone and the Longworth Hall to promote a tournament in March.²³⁴ A similar phenomenon was exhibited in Mullingar where a number of ladies of similar social status organised a 'ping-pong' tournament and an American croquet tournament at the grounds of the Westmeath Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club in aid of the Cigas Bazaar in Dublin.²³⁵

The limited involvement of women in sports administration offers support for the separate spheres theory and women's docility in sports participation. There is little evidence of women acting as patrons or as administrative officers. The Athlone Cricket and Lawn Tennis Club was exceptional as women were appointed to the main administrative positions of the tennis section of the club. Mrs Robson and Miss Haslam were elected treasurers and Miss Tighe secretary at the 1895 AGM of the club.²³⁶ The initial tournament of the club received subscriptions from the Misses Stokes and Mrs and the Misses Sheffield were also responsible for organising subscriptions. A member of the ladies committee, Miss S. J. Smith was responsible for collecting one-fifth of the entire amount collected by subscription.²³⁷ The sole function of the ladies' committee established by the Garden Vale Club in 1895 and succeeding years was to provide refreshments at matches and club days.²³⁸ The ladies' committee of the Mullingar based County Club had a similar function. These roles helped to emphasise what was regarded as the essential domesticity of the female.

The surviving minute books provide accurate evidence of female involvement in golf. The Westmeath Golf Club had thirteen lady members in the 1904-5 season out of a

²³³ *WI*, 1 Feb., 8 Feb., 22 Feb. 1902.

²³⁴ *WI*, 8 March 1902.

²³⁵ *WG*, 9 May 1902.

²³⁶ *WI*, 27 April 1895.

²³⁷ *WI*, 31 July 1886, 7 Aug. 1886.

²³⁸ *WI*, 28 April 1894.

total membership of seventy-one.²³⁹ The club's female membership in 1909 had increased to forty-five from a total of 137, a proportionate increase from eighteen per cent to thirty-three per cent.²⁴⁰ Eighteen of these lady members were married and at least twelve of them shared club membership with their husbands indicative of the importance of shared family recreation. The female membership included eight family groups composed of seven mothers and daughters and one group of sisters. In the period between 1898-1901, twenty-five of the eighty-five members of the Athlone Garrison Golf Club were female, and seventeen of these women were married.

Golf and tennis clubs actively encouraged women's participation by making available preferential subscription rates. The Athlone cricket and lawn tennis club in 1887 offered female membership at half the male rate. Male membership of this club cost 15s. and female membership 7s. 6d.²⁴¹ This was a fifty per cent increase, on the previous season, an adjustment that that was applied equally to both sexes.²⁴² Family participation was encouraged by the membership fee structure. In 1904, family membership of Westmeath County (Golf) Club cost £2, gentlemen membership £1 10s. and female membership 15s. On the casting vote of the chairman, the AGM of 1904 rejected a motion to impose an entry fee on members.²⁴³ The female golfers were not formally represented at committee level throughout the period of this study but there is no evidence in the minute books of either club of significantly restricted female access to the courses. The Westmeath Golf Club organised a regular Saturday silver spoon competition for its members in which the lady members had the right to compete 'on every Saturday save the first Saturday of each month being the date fixed for Gentlemen's medal play'.²⁴⁴ This is the only record of any restrictions that were operative against lady members. The Athlone Garrison Club's competitions were open to all members where Mrs Pearson was one of the lowest handicapped players.

A feature of elite female involvement in tennis and golf was the extent to which a number of married women were active participants. As in central Scotland active

²³⁹ CWGC, membership list written on front pages.

²⁴⁰ CWGC, membership list for 1909-10.

²⁴¹ *WI*, 12 May 1888.

²⁴² *WI*, 2 April 1887.

²⁴³ CWGC, minute of AGM of 17 Oct. 1904.

²⁴⁴ CWGC, minute of 2 Dec. 1905

participation in sport was not restricted to unmarried girls.²⁴⁵ The active membership of the Garden Vale Croquet Club included at least ten married and eight single ladies who participated in club competitions between 1898 and 1900. The lawn tennis equivalent had an equal distribution of single and married active ladies but only four married ladies were involved at a competitive level, the remainder were involved at administrative level and in particular shared responsibility for entertainment.

A small number of Westmeath women became enthusiastic competitors in tennis, golf and croquet and for a few, this competitive zeal was fulfilled by participation in regional, national and United Kingdom wide competition. In the period of this study there was no record of women competing in cycling but tennis, golf, croquet and tabletennis inter and intra club competition featured women's events. In 1896 the Athlone Garrison Golf Club featured a mixed foursomes competition when Surgeon Major and Mrs Crofts defeated Lieutenant Thorpe and his partner in the final. The ladies stroke play competition of April 1898 attracted entries from seven ladies.²⁴⁶ Miss Hodson, of the Garden Vale club, was the first to create an impression nationally, when she competed at the Fitzwilliam lawn tennis tournament, in May 1899. Her performance attracted the attention of the London journal *Lawn Tennis and Croquet*. According to this journal, Miss Hodson must be placed 'absolutely in the first class'.

She is very active and very steady: her style is easy, rather too easy in fact. If she took more pains in making her ground-strokes firmer and bolder and developed an overhand service she would be almost invincible.²⁴⁷

The 1899 success continued a trend begun the previous year. In September 1898, Miss Hodson was a winner at her host club's open tournament and earlier in the year she had been successful at open tournaments in Roscrea, Nenagh and Galway.²⁴⁸ In the early 1900s, a number of Athlone ladies became part of the national croquet competitive circuit, a trend that began when Captain and Mrs Preston competed in the

²⁴⁵ Neil Tranter, 'Organized sport and the middle-class woman in nineteenth century Scotland' in the *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 1989, 6, 1, 41.

²⁴⁶ *WI*, 14 May 1898.

²⁴⁷ Quoted in *Westmeath Independent* 3 June 1899.

²⁴⁸ *WG*, 17 Sept. 1898.

Irish croquet championships at Fitzwilliam in 1901.²⁴⁹ The most successful of these was Miss Coote, daughter of sports evangelist Orlando Coote. In August 1901, she won the South of Ireland croquet championship.²⁵⁰ In July 1902, Mrs Preston won the North of Ireland championship and Miss Coote the South of Ireland title.²⁵¹ According to one historian of the game, 'Nina Coote was a beautiful woman with large eyes and an aquiline nose and played with a rather wild vivacity that was in complete contrast to the more studied style of her closest rival'.²⁵² She won the Ladies' Open Championships in 1903 and 1905, a year in which she also won the mixed doubles, the Irish gold medals and the gold caskets.²⁵³ She played with a golfer's wide swing and usually completed her games in record time although her inconsistent play also attracted attention.²⁵⁴ Mrs Preston won the 1903 croquet championship of Ireland and defeated her club-mate in the semi-final. Miss Coote then went on to win the first class singles handicap tournament at the same event.²⁵⁵ In May 1903, Coote won the first of her English championship titles, in an event that was contested by forty-three players, at Wimbledon, a victory that meant the Garden Vale club members held the Irish and English championship titles.²⁵⁶ The game was sufficiently popular with the ladies of Athlone that the club was able to travel to Banagher, county Offaly to challenge the local ladies in an inter-club event.²⁵⁷ Clearly players such as these were far more than refining influences and decorative additions to the croquet lawns and were little concerned about displaying passivity or subordination.

Cycling offered tremendous potential for liberation to middle-class females yet there is very little evidence of female participation in recreational or competitive cycling in Westmeath. Cycling offered females the opportunity to participate in active forms of recreation and was especially attractive to those who had never previously engaged in sport or pastimes. The bicycle represented the means by which girls could escape

²⁴⁹ *WI*, 4 May 1901.

²⁵⁰ *WI*, 31 Aug. 1901.

²⁵¹ *WI*, 26 July 1902.

²⁵² Nicky Smith, *Queen of Games: a history of croquet*, London, 1991, 46.

²⁵³ *Ibid*, 47.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid*.

²⁵⁵ *WI*, 23 May 1903.

²⁵⁶ *WI*, 23 May 1903.

²⁵⁷ *WI*, 19 July 1902.

from chaperonage and other forms of control over their movements. It was an opportunity that the women of Westmeath did not avail of.

Female involvement in cycling was limited to passive participation, as spectators who followed behind their male friends on their organised recreational outings.²⁵⁸ The Athlone club in particular was especially anxious to increase female participation in the club. Upwards of fifty ladies were invited to the club's quadrille party in 1894 but, when only twenty-five acknowledged the invite and twelve accepted, the club was forced to organise a bachelor party and smoking concert instead.²⁵⁹ A motion was passed in 1896 that opened club membership to ladies but there is evidence of only one woman availing of this facility.²⁶⁰ This was Miss Gladstone who was an active participant in the club's outings and was proficient enough to cycle the thirty-five miles from Athlone to Mullingar in May 1896.²⁶¹ The members of the Athlone club were aware of the potential of the club for increasing social contact between young adults at a time when opportunities for meeting the opposite sex in an unsupervised setting were limited. Women were prepared to participate in the socialisation associated with cycling but were not prepared for active participation as cyclists.

The women who were actively involved in sport were those whose economic and domestic situation was such that they were free of any financial and time constraints that might have restricted their involvement. They were sufficiently independent and isolated to ignore contemporary ideas on the role of women in society. Mrs Edith Preston, whose achievements have been outlined above, was the wife of the Resident Magistrate, John Preston, and resided in a seventeen roomed, first class house at Athlone. A domestic staff of five female servants, that included a governess, a parlour maid, a lady's maid, a cook and house maid, managed the household chores and took care of the needs of the Preston's four children, aged between sixteen and eight, in 1901.²⁶² This domestic and economic independence allowed Mrs Preston to travel extensively to compete in croquet events and in 1902 she recorded victories in Belfast, Mullingar, Tullamore, Cork, Dublin, Athlone and Chichester whilst her

²⁵⁸ *WI*, 20 April 1895.

²⁵⁹ *WI*, 16 March 1896.

²⁶⁰ *WI*, 7 March 1896.

²⁶¹ *WN*, 14 May 1896.

²⁶² *Census of Ireland, 1901*, Enumerator's returns.

daughter was also successful in Tullamore, Dublin and Cork.²⁶³ The Misses Hodson and Coote who also competed seriously at national level shared a landed gentry background. These women were free of any time or financial constraints that might have inhibited their participation.

Conclusion

Golf and tennis clubs, with one notable exception, were permanent features of the sporting and cultural landscape, during the period examined in this study. Ironically, cycling clubs, which required the least infra-structural investment, proved to be the ephemeral organisations. The lifecycle of the cycling clubs established in Westmeath extended no longer than five years. Cycling clubs initial function was limited to the organisation of recreational outings to the rural surrounds linked to visits to places of historic and cultural interest. These outings attracted small numbers of members that limited the social dimension of the activity. Socialisation required mass participation, which was never a feature of the Westmeath cycling club. This socialisation was an essential element of the sporting experience, as is abundantly clear throughout this study, and cycling's failure to develop this dimension was an important factor in club demise. The rapid development of the bicycle as a means of transport and as a work related device effectively took the bicycle out of the leisure sphere and gave it a utilitarian purpose. The bicycle was no longer a status-enhancing accessory and therefore its popularity with the middle classes declined. The result was that the vocational group most closely associated with the bicycle at the end of the century, the RIC, also formed the strongest cycling club in the county. Cycling was popular in the 1890s, a popularity associated with its novelty value and its value as means of enhancing the status of clerks and shops assistants.

The organisation of athletic sports events became an important part of a cycling club's activity and this may also have helped to shorten the life span of a club. This diverted attention from the club's primary function and was motivated by concerns with enhancing status and respectability as it was about organising a sporting event. The fundraising and administration associated with these events were significantly different to the original club objectives and quickly led to the energy, enthusiasm and

²⁶³ *WI*, 20 Sept. 1902.

commitment of club officers becoming exhausted. This was quickly followed by club demise.

In the hierarchy of social prestige associated with the clubs, membership of a lawn-tennis club offered the highest status. There is little evidence of tennis bridging the gap between the upper and middle classes that Richard Holt identifies as one of the game's great virtues.²⁶⁴ In so far as this happened the middle class members attracted to the game came from confined section of this group. The specifically middle class Athlone club was ephemeral, partly because its class structure proved to be a restrictive influence on its progress. The nature of its membership prevented its integration into the wider tennis networks and some of the names associated with this club found the Athlone Golf Club a more appropriate institution for recreation and socialisation. Golf as it developed became increasingly the preserve of the higher status professionals with doctors, lawyers and bank managers dominating membership lists. In Mullingar, special efforts were made to attract bank personnel to the game. Bankers, under the rank of manager or agent, were admitted at half the normal subscription rate in 1904.²⁶⁵ As a winter activity its appeal to the sporting members of the landed gentry was limited. Hunting still remained the core activity for this group.

A small number of women of independent mind and means and supported by husbands or fathers, defied the orthodoxy of the day, and stepped outside the bounds of domesticity and actively participated in lawn tennis and golf. The evidence from Westmeath on women's sports participation is similar to the findings of Neil Tranter in his Scottish studies and would suggest that the behaviour of upper and middle class Victorian and Edwardian women, and the reactions of men towards them did not always conform to what was the desired ideal. The extent of female participation, as both players and spectators, their frequent shared participation with men, the competitive zeal displayed by some, and the extent to which married as well as single women took part, all suggest that the acceptance of the separate spheres lifestyle thesis was not universal. Similarly, based on male willingness to support female participation, their willingness to compete in mixed-gender events in tennis, croquet and golf and risk defeat by females in the latter two activities, and their practice of

²⁶⁴ Holt, *Sport and the British*, 126.

²⁶⁵ WGC, minute of AGM of 17 Oct. 1904.

offering women preferential membership rates would suggest that some middle and upper class males rejected the prevailing orthodoxy.²⁶⁶

The sports examined in this chapter all used a handicap system as a means of equalising competition. The use of a handicapping system was a manifestation of the public schools 'fair-play' ethos, as it made the games accessible to the young and old, to male and female alike and attempted to create an equal chance of success for all competitors. Handicaps, in theory, eliminated inequalities and made the games available to those with a wide range of physical and skill related attributes. Golf and tennis, apart from providing social meeting occasions, were attractive in that they were undemanding physically, able to operate to a lowest common denominator, lacked any possibility of serious injury, and catered for mixed gender activities. These attributes were also responsible for the croquet boom that took place in the late 1890s. The timing of this growth is also relevant to any explanation for the development. It happened approximately ten years after the initial tennis boom. The age profile of the tennis player at this stage was one that made croquet a particularly attractive proposition for both genders. The game required a high degree of fine motor skill and hand-eye coordination and was one in which women made no concession to male supremacy.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁶ Neil Tranter, 'Women & sport in nineteenth century Scotland', in Grant Jarvie and Graham Walker (eds.), *Scottish sport in the making of the nation: ninety minute patriots?* Leicester, 1994, 39.

²⁶⁷ Parratt, 'Athletic womanhood', 150.

Chapter 4:Cricket, 1850-1905

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the development of cricket in the county. Cricket was the game that enjoyed the most continuity of play and by the end of the century was the game with the greatest popular appeal. Westmeath cricket, in the period covered by this study, experienced an extra-ordinary metamorphosis that saw it transformed from being the preserve of the elite to one in which the agricultural labourer was the main participant. It will be shown that cricket did not decline as a sport in the 1880s, as is commonly perceived, but that the game experienced its most rigorous period of growth during the 1880s and 1890s. Far from being an elitist activity, cricket became the sport with a widespread appeal and the activity that allowed the workingman the opportunity of enjoying the sporting experience and its integral ancillary activities.

Irish historians have largely ignored cricket as a subject worthy of academic interrogation. Apart from three important journal articles and a recent seminal local study, the sport has remained unexplored in popular and academic journals.¹ Despite this lack of analysis, a number of accepted ‘truths’ on the role and importance of cricket in Irish society, unsupported by quantitative data, have emerged. Commentators have accepted that cricket’s popularity declined sharply after the 1870s, that it was confined to a narrow social elite and that its growth was associated with military presence in Ireland. Historians who have commented on cricket’s importance to Irish Victorian culture have identified the 1870s as the decade of the sports peak of popularity. Marcus de Burca considered that the rapid growth of the GAA brought to a halt the spread of cricket in rural areas where the game had gained a foothold.² Alan Bairner and John Sugden adopt a similar position and believe that the rapid growth that cricket experienced in the 1860s and 1870s was halted, both ‘as an indirect consequence of Land League activities and as a direct result of the G.A.A.

¹ Neal Garnham, ‘The Roles of Cricket in Victorian and Edwardian Ireland’ in *Sporting Traditions, Journal of the Australian society for sports history*, 19, 2, 2003, 27-48. Davis, ‘Irish cricket’. Tom Hunt, ‘Classless Cricket? Westmeath, 1880-1905’, in *History Ireland*, 12, 2, 2004, 26-30. Patrick Bracken, ‘Foreign and Fantastic Field Sports’: *Cricket in County Tipperary*, Thurles, 2004.

² Marcus de Burca, *The GAA: a history of the Gaelic Athletic Association*, Dublin, 1980, 25.

with its avowed policy to usurp such foreign games as cricket'.³ They suggest that the activities of the former soured relationships between sponsoring landlords and playing tenants and as a result the game withered and died. Neal Garnham using a more empirical approach, based on newspaper analysis and use of Lawrence's cricket handbooks, also identified a general decline in cricket during the 1870s.⁴ In addition, Garnham suggests that in the years before widespread organised agrarian agitation landlords had either withdrawn their patronage of cricket or simply not offered it in the first place.⁵ The importance of military garrisons in spreading the cricket gospel in Ireland is a recurrent theme in Irish sporting literature. According to Trevor West cricket is the only sport that can be accurately referred to as a garrison game, for cricket clubs sprang up in remarkable profusion around the middle of the nineteenth century in the vicinity of army barracks or on the estates of the gentry'.⁶ Patrick Bracken's study identified a decline in cricket playing in Tipperary during and after the Land War, partly associated with withdrawn landlord patronage, a decline that levelled out in the years prior to and during the formation of the GAA. In the 1890s, the game was revived with renewed vigour, before declining in the 1900s.⁷

Cricket has also been portrayed as the chosen pastime of the higher social groups. Stanley Bergin and Derek Scott writing in 1980 considered that 'whatever cricket was played in Ireland was confined essentially to the military, the gentry and members of the vice-regal or Chief Secretary's staff and household'.⁸ The restricted popularity of Irish cricket was acknowledged by Lawrence in 1880 when he described cricket as dependent on 'the aristocracy and the well-to-do commercial class' rather than being the 'pastime of the masses, as it is in England'. He also suggested that the financial difficulties these classes were having at the time was responsible for their lack of support for the game.⁹

³ John Sugden and Alan Bairner, *Sport, sectarianism and society in a divided Ireland*, London, 1993, 50.

⁴ Garnham, 'Roles of cricket', 28-9.

⁵ Ibid. 32.

⁶ West, *The bold collegians: the development of sport in Trinity College*, Dublin, 1991, 13.

⁷ Bracken, *Foreign and fantastic*, 102, 105-24.

⁸ Stanley Bergin and Derek Scott, 'Cricket in Ireland', in E.W. Swanton (ed.), *Barclay's World of Cricket*, London, 1980, 508.

⁹ Lawrence, *Handbook*, 1880-81, 2.

The evidence that emerges from this empirically based study challenges the accepted view. In Westmeath, cricket experienced a period of growth between 1880 and 1900, and only began to decline in the early years of the new century. The game also enjoyed democratic status within the county being the only sport of widespread popular appeal

Early Irish cricket

The first formal game of cricket played in Ireland took place in the Phoenix Park in August 1792 between the Garrison and an All-Ireland selection however it made little progress until the 1830s when a number of teams scattered across the country played games against each other. Non-metropolitan centres of the game in the 1830s included Ballinasloe, county Galway, Kilkenny city and Carlow.¹⁰ In Dublin, the Phoenix Club was founded in 1830, followed by the Trinity College Club in 1835 and the Leinster Cricket Club ten years later.¹¹ The Phoenix Club is generally considered to be the oldest in the country pre-dating the Carlow County Club by one year but it has been suggested that the latter club was founded in 1823 and that the Carlow landlord class introduced the game to Dublin. There was a significant involvement of landlords from the county in the establishment of the Phoenix Club and in the 1830s the Carlow season always began with two games against the Dublin club.¹² In 1835, the Phoenix Club had secured its own ground south of the canal behind upper Baggot street and at this stage was strongly influenced by Lord Clonbrock, Lord Dunlo and John Parnell who introduced cricket to Wicklow when he founded a club at Avondale.¹³ By 1850, according to Trevor West, cricket had spread to the ‘most unlikely parts of rural Ireland’ as well as gaining a foothold in the larger towns, due to the combined influence of the gentry and the military.¹⁴ Neal Garnham’s analysis of the cricket handbooks of John Lawrence has established that, by 1871, cricket clubs existed in every county in Ireland.¹⁵

¹⁰ W.P. Hone, *Cricket in Ireland*, Tralee, 1956, 6-15.

¹¹ Trevor West, *The bold collegians*, 14.

¹² N.D. McMillan, *One hundred and fifty years of cricket and sport in county Carlow: an illustrated history of conflict and sport, 1823-1981*, Carlow, 1981, 5.

¹³ T.M. Payal, *The Phoenix Club, 1830-1980, a history of the club*, Dublin, 1981, np.

¹⁴ West, *Bold collegians*, 14.

¹⁵ Garnham, ‘The Roles of cricket’, 29.

Westmeath Cricket 1850-1880

This analysis of cricket in Westmeath is divided into two phases. The period between 1850-79 will be considered initially. In this period the game was restricted spatially and socially. It was confined to the main towns in the county, to three schools, to teams organised by members of the gentry and to the military regiments based in Athlone and Mullingar. Socially the game was the almost exclusive preserve of the landed gentry and those who shared a similar background such as the higher status professions and county administrators.

Cricket in the 1850s was a sporadic activity with only seventeen games in total reported in the local press. The first recorded cricket game in Westmeath during the period of this study was played between Kilbeggan and the Vignoles estate at Cornaher in September 1852. This was followed by a return match in October.¹⁶ Other matches were confined to games played by the County Westmeath Club against neighbouring county Meath and against various military regiments based in the county. Supportive gentry families hosted games, as at this stage the county club did not have a permanent venue. A two-day match with the Roebuck Club from Dublin was played on ground that bordered Lough Derravaragh where the hospitality of Sir Percy Nugent, ‘the chief supporter of cricket in the county’ was enjoyed.¹⁷ In 1855-56 matches against Meath were played at Turbotstown, the seat of James Arthur Dease and at Baltrasna, the residence of Anthony O’ Reilly, D.L.¹⁸

In contrast the 1860s was an extremely active decade with 244 games reported. This was followed by a sharp decline in the 1870s when only seventy-one matches were reported. This local pattern of chronological change was a reflection of national trends. Neal Garnham’s analysis of Lawrence’s incomplete data identified the late 1860s and early 1870s as the peak period of Irish cricket activity. The yearly variation in games played within the county for the period 1860-1879 is illustrated in Figure 14.

¹⁶ *WI*, 23 Sept. 1852, 14 Oct. 1852.

¹⁷ *WI*, 16 Sept. 1854.

¹⁸ *WG*, 23 Aug. 1855, 6 Sept 1855, 18 Sept. 1866.

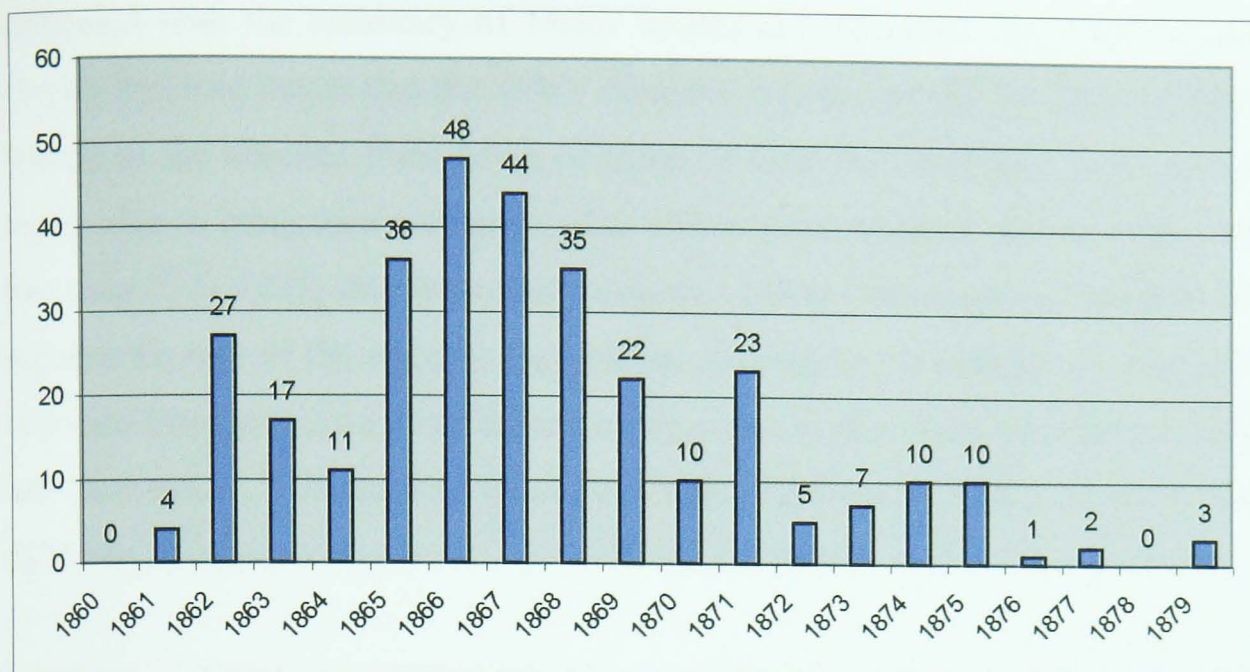


Figure 14: Cricket matches played in Westmeath, 1860-1879.

It is possible to gain an insight into the structure and organisation of cricket within the county at the time and the changes and continuities of those who played the game. In the period between 1850 and 1879, thirty-nine different Westmeath combinations played the sport. Associations that represented the landed classes ranging from the Westmeath County Club to teams representing individuals from this particular social group dominated. The Westmeath County Club activity peaked in the second half of the 1860s but from 1874 onwards neither Lawrence nor the local press contains any reference to county club games for the remainder of the decade (Table 22). At this stage the club had procured its own ground that was also used to host other sporting events. A pigeon shoot advertised for January 1874, illustrates the extent to which county and military society was integrated, and the extent to which their sporting interests coalesced. Members of the Westmeath Hunt Club, the Westmeath County Cricket Club, officers of the Westmeath Rifles and serving officers quartered in Athlone, Mullingar and Longford were eligible to compete.¹⁹

The Westmeath County Club's core playing membership was confined to a small number of individuals drawn from the ranks of the middle ranking landed gentry. In this study the importance of individual influence to the promotion of sport is a recurring theme and, regardless of the social class involved the impact of the enthusiastic individual was a key one. The Westmeath club's most active period

¹⁹ *WG*, 15 Jan. 1874.

coincided with the residency of Major Moore at Mullingar. The small number of players involved meant that the club’s existence was precarious. In 1869, for instance, ‘owing to the absence from home of some of their best men they were not in any match able to bring their eleven together and in some matches not more than four or five men’.²⁰ In 1873, the ‘Westmeath County Cricket Club could not get their eleven together for any of the matches they played...owing to the absence of some of their best men from home; they had consequently either to play short, or press emergencies into their stride’.²¹ There is no record of County Club activity for the period between 1874-80.

Year	Played	Won	Drew	Tie	Lost
1865	21	12	1	-	8
1866	26	21	2	-	3
1867	21	11	2	1	7
1868	15	9	4	-	2
1869	7	1	0	-	6
1870	7	1	0	-	6
1871	8	3	1	-	4
1872	2	2	0	-	-
1873	4	1	0	-	3

Source: Lawrence’s Handbook of Cricket.

Table 22: Playing record of Westmeath County Cricket Club, 1865-1873.

Members of the landed gentry, such as Captain Nugent, Mr Hudson, Mr Hornridge, Major Moore, E. J. Cooper, Mr Fetherstonhaugh and the Hon. P. Greville-Nugent, when they were not active with the county team, organised their own matches. Demesne-centred combinations associated with the same individuals such as those representing Calverston, Tyrrellspass, and Carrick were also active at this time. Some Westmeath individuals interested in the sport also played with clubs outside the county.

Clubs were also established in the major urban areas during this period and are listed for Athlone, Mullingar, Kilbeggan, Castlepollard and Delvin. Three schools, Wilson’s Hospital, Farra and Ranelagh School also promoted cricket as part of their curriculum. The Kilbeggan club were sufficiently well organised at this time to be able to organise

²⁰ Lawrence, *Handbook*, 1869-70, 147.
²¹ Lawrence, *Handbook*, 1873-4, 160.

an end of season game in 1862 between the first team and the second and third elevens of the club.²² The popularity of the game in Kilbeggan was due to the influence of Tom Quinn, a property owner and land agent who was a native of the area. Quinn was a member of the Phoenix Club in Dublin and was, according to one commentator, ‘the best bowler of his day. His batting and fielding were also good’.²³ Quinn was part of Charles Lawrence’s All-Ireland XI of 1855 and an All-Ireland XXII that played against an All-England XI in 1860.²⁴ A club was established in Athlone in June 1871 with the MP for the town J. J. Ennis and Lord Castlemaine as patrons. The club’s six match programme embraced all the game’s interest groups and included two matches with the Roscommon county, two with the 98th regiment and one with Ranelagh School. The club was strongly representative of the town’s business interests.²⁵

The opposition sourced for these games also provides an insight into the organisation and structure of the game at the time. The Westmeath County Club’s main source of opposition was the Athlone or Mullingar based military regiments, followed by games with similar county-based gentry selections. In the club’s four busiest seasons from 1865-68 matches were played against county based teams including Wicklow, Meath, Cavan, Roscommon, Longford and Galway. Included in the Wicklow side was Charles Stewart Parnell who was dismissed without scoring a single run.²⁶ The landed gentry also dominated combinations that used non-county nomenclature as a means of identity, such as Summerhill (county Meath) and Edenderry (King’s county). The Summerhill club was founded in 1863 and benefited from the patronage of Dr D. Trotter. He presented the members ‘with an excellent piece of ground containing three acres that formed part of the gentleman’s demesne’. He followed this the following year by erecting a ‘spacious pavilion for the club’.²⁷

²² *WG*, 17 Oct. 1862.

²³ Lawrence, *Handbook*, 1865-66, 63; Arthur Samuels, *Early cricket in Ireland*, Dublin, 1888, 12.

²⁴ Samuels, *Early cricket*, 18, 21-22.

²⁵ Slater, *Directory*, 1870, 10-13. The club included two Burgess brothers members of one of Athlone’s most important milliner families, J. Kilkelly from a linen and woollen draper family, J. Turkington from one of Athlone’s principal bakeries, three Charlton brothers who were medical students, J O’Connor whose family manufactured billiard tables and were billiard room keepers and M Hynds who was a tax collector. Thomas Hogan, the treasurer was the post-master and the proprietor of a fancy goods store.

²⁶ *WG*, 17 Aug. 1865.

²⁷ Lawrence, *Handbook*, 1865-66, 63.

A number of schools including Stoneyhurst College from Lancashire, Hollyville Pupils, St Stanislaus College and Sandymount were included in the competitive loop of the Westmeath County Club. In the early 1870s, according to Lawrence, many schools that had for years opposed school cricket as it ‘distracted attention’ from study were now amongst ‘the liberal supporters of the game’. Public schools offered the advantage of a designated sports ground and a curriculum that placed an emphasis on sport for its health promoting value. Despite this the game failed to prosper in the schools due to the very short summer term and the introduction of the Intermediate Education Act of 1878 reduced the school cricket season to just six weeks. ‘Nothing’, Lawrence believed, ‘could be more injurious to the noble game’.²⁸ The Westmeath County Club played an annual match with the Jesuit St Stanislaus College at Rahan in the King’s county just outside the border of Westmeath. The college was noted for its cricket crease laid by Fr Wisthoff, who had come from Germany.²⁹ The restricted school summer term inspired some students to establish clubs in their home districts to satisfy their cricket passions during the summer months. The Clonmacnoise Cricket Club, outside Athlone, was founded in 1865 by the Charlton brothers, students of the Royal School, Banagher, ‘in order to keep themselves in practice during the summer months.’³⁰ This period of activity for the county club included a weeklong visit to Dublin where matches against the military, educational establishments, the Vice-Regal Lodge, and leading clubs such as the Civil Service Club and the Phoenix Club were organised.³¹

In this period, the landed gentry and the schools that specialised in the education of their sons dominated the game. The most important sources of opposition for these clubs were the locally based military garrison clubs. Although the landed and associated classes may have dominated the game, cricket was not the exclusive preserve of these particular social groups. Urban-based professionals and merchants were becoming involved. Overall, in this period, Westmeath cricket conforms to the historical stereotype.

²⁸ Lawrence, *Handbook*, 1878, 22; Garnham, *The roles of cricket*, 33.

²⁹ Michael Byrne, ‘Tullabeg, Rahan, Tullamore, 1818-1991’, in *Offaly Heritage: journal of the Offaly historical and archaeological society*, 2, 2004, 93.

³⁰ Lawrence, *Handbook*, 1867-68, 75-6.

³¹ *WG*, 21 July 1864, 26 July, 2 Aug. 1866.

Westmeath Cricket 1880-1905

The years between 1880-1905 were the years of peak activity in Westmeath cricket, a time when the game was allegedly in decline nationally. The popularity of the game during this time has been established by conducting a fine-grained analysis of the four main newspapers published in the county, using the methodology outlined earlier. Despite the shortcomings outlined in the introductory chapter, the overall trends that emerged are more than sufficient to establish the role and importance of cricket in local society during the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

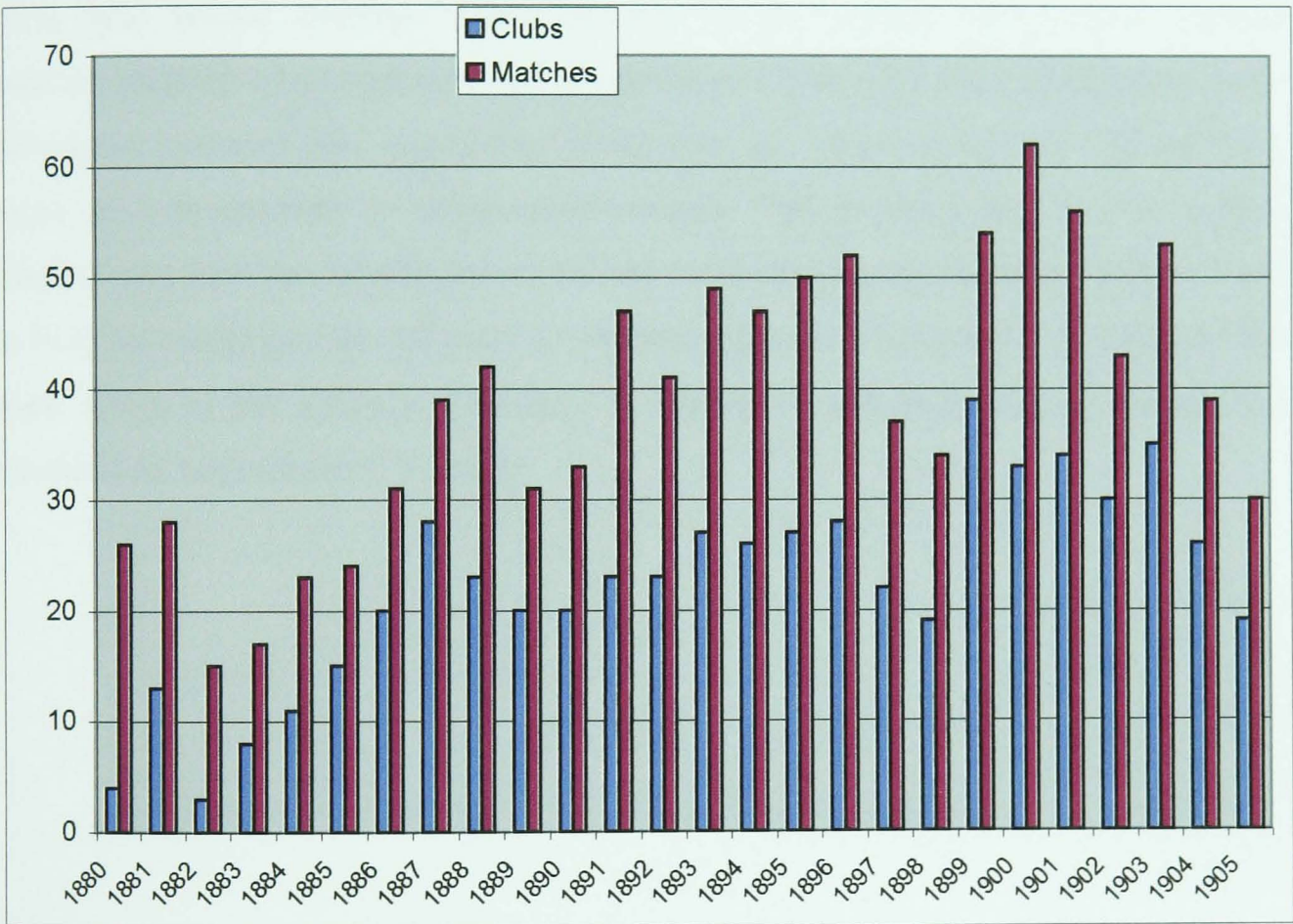


Figure 15: Number of cricket combinations active and matches played in county Westmeath, 1880-1905.

An examination of the number of games played and the number of teams active was used to measure the growth of cricket during this period. The pattern that emerged is illustrated in Figure 15 above. In the period 1880-1905, an incredible 1003 cricket games were reported and, given the reservations on under-reporting expressed earlier, undoubtedly over 1,200 cricket matches were played within the county in this twenty-

six year period.³² 179 different civilian groups were identified as active at some stage during the period between 1880-1905.

The analysis established that a large proportion of clubs were ephemeral associations whose members came together for a single match and then dispersed. In the period 1880-1905, sixty-eight combinations are listed as involved in only one fixture and a further fifty-nine appeared in newspaper reports over two or three seasons. At the other end of the scale, twelve clubs were reportedly active over at least ten seasons. These clubs were properly constituted organisations that had a constitution and by-laws, held annual meetings where officers for the season were elected, regular practice sessions were organised and an annual ball concluded the season. Many wore distinctive uniforms that emphasised their sense of collective identity and set them apart as a community of respectable athletes. The numbers involved in certain districts was such that twenty-five clubs had sufficient playing numbers to allow them to field an occasional second team or promote a juvenile section. The location of the most active of the clubs is illustrated in Figure 16 and their playing records are tabulated in Appendices 6, 7 and 8.

³² See, introduction, 6.

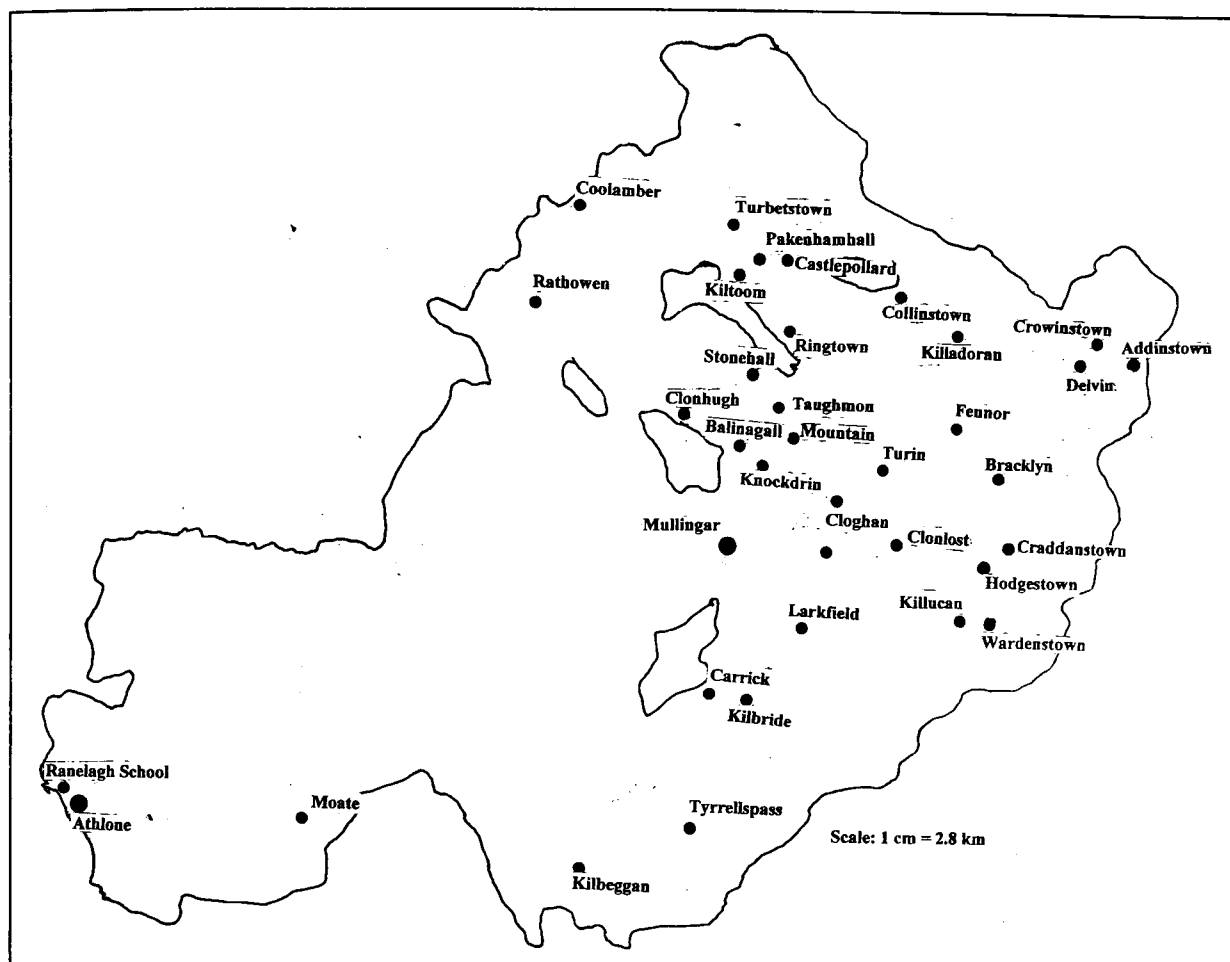


Figure 16: Cricket playing districts in Westmeath, 1880-1905.

Club structure 1880-1905

The 179 different civilian cricket combinations active in Westmeath in the period 1880-1905 can be divided into a number of categories and this classification illustrates the broad appeal of the game in the 1880s and 1890s. One group, forming 16.0 per cent of the total, consisted of well-to-do individuals who assembled a group of their friends to challenge a combination formed by individuals of similar status. Twenty-eight different individuals were involved in these games the majority of which were once off events. This group chiefly included landed estate proprietors such as Mr. C. Clibborn and Mr F. W. Russell at Moate, Mr Murray at Mount Murray, Mullingar, Mr P. O' Reilly of Coolamber. They also included the selections of J. H. Locke, landowner and joint proprietor of Kilbeggan distillery and of the Church of Ireland rector Rev. H. St. George. This form of recreation was particularly popular with the O'Reilly's of Coolamber where regular games were organised particularly with the Mullingar-based regiments. These matches brought together members of the local gentry that were part of the O'Reilly social circle for recreation and socialisation

in the natural environment of the landlord demesne. Members of the Tottenham, Bond, Wilson, Murray and Dease families featured in August 1889, for instance, when Coolamber entertained the Royal Irish Rifles.³³

Position	Officer	Position	Acreage of estate
President	G. A. Rochfort-Boyd	Deputy-Lieutenant	9, 431
Vice-President	C. Brinsley-Marlay	Deputy-Lieutenant	9,059
Vice-President	Ralph Smyth	Deputy-Lieutenant	6,287
Hon-Secretary	Charles Tottenham		2,588
Asst.-Secretary	Robert Harden	Clerk of the Union	-
Committee	Colonel Vetch	Army officer	-
Committee	Colonel Malone	Resident gentry	12,554
Committee	Philip O'Reilly	Deputy-Lieutenant	182
Committee	Wm.Fetherston-Haugh		871
Committee	John Lyons		1,357
Committee	Edmund Dease		2,315
Committee	John Hornridge		177

Source: *Westmeath Guardian*, 8 July 1887.

Table 23: Officers, local administration posts held and size of family estate, of committee of Westmeath Cricket Club in 1887.

The elite Westmeath County Club represented the composite team of this particular group. The club was revived in April 1881 and claimed a membership of seventy. The club’s old grounds on the outskirts of Mullingar were re-furbished and Monday and Thursdays were established as practice evenings.³⁴ Officers of the Mullingar based garrisons were admitted as honorary members.³⁵ The annual fee of one guinea and the requirement of members joining after 1 May 1887 to pay an entrance fee of one guinea helped to regulate membership and finance the season’s activities.³⁶ The renaissance season of 1881 was a particularly active one as the club played eighteen matches, winning ten, losing six with two games drawn.³⁷ This was the club of the landed gentry and their associates employed in local government posts, the higher professions and those involved in education at head-master level. Newspaper reports that identify those who attended the annual meetings of 1881 and 1887 and the officer board elected in 1887 provide an insight into the socio-economic profile of the club

³³ *WE*, 30 Aug. 1889.
³⁴ *WG*, 1 April 1881.
³⁵ *WG*, 20 May 1881.
³⁶ *WG*, 8 July 1887.
³⁷ Lawrence, *Handbook*, 1880-81, 167.

membership. Detail on the officers in 1887 and their position in society is summarised in Table 23. Apart from the officers listed above other landed family members associated with the club included J. C. Caulfield, W. Murray, H. P. Wilson, and William Hodson. Local government officials involved with the club included M. F. Barnes, the deputy-sheriff; A.E. Joyce, the assistant county-surveyor, T.C. Foster, the headmaster of Farra School, T.A. Seagrave, and bank-manger E.C. Fitzpatrick.

The club began the 1892 season in serious fashion and employed a professional, Percy Muldowney, to manage the grounds at Ballinderry.³⁸ He was required to be in attendance every day during the season to bowl to members wishing to practise.³⁹ Muldowney then became an ubiquitous figure in Westmeath cricket and his name appeared on the team list of several clubs across the social classes.⁴⁰ The support of the members for the club however was less than total and an 1892 report suggested 'as was often the case in previous years, members of our county club were conspicuous by their absence, notwithstanding the efforts of the hon. sec.'⁴¹ Despite the difficulties in organising members the club affiliated to the Irish Cricket Union and became involved in formal competition in 1895 when it unsuccessfully competed in the Leinster Junior Cup competition.⁴² This was to be the club's penultimate season and after 1896 there is no record of the County Westmeath Club's existence.

Another group of teams was directly associated with landed demesnes such as those of Lord Greville's Clonhugh demesne, Charles B. Marlay's Rochfort establishment, Tudenham Park of the Tottenham family, Killula Castle associated with the Nugent family, Lord Longford's Pakenham Hall and in particular the Coolamber estate of the most sports obsessed of Westmeath's landed families, the O'Reilly's. This group formed about 7.0 per cent of the total. These matches formed an important part of the social life of the landed gentry and were associated with sumptuous luncheons and musical entertainment provided by the regimental bands of the Athlone or Mullingar based garrisons. At this level the organization of a cricket match was a good way of entertaining friends, neighbours, tenants and even labourers. After the match between

³⁸ *WG*, 22 April 1892.

³⁹ *WG*, 20 May 1892.

⁴⁰ Apart from the County club, Muldowney played with the Mountain Parish, Clonhugh, D. Kiernan's XI, Mount Street and Coolamber selections. He was also a Mullingar Shamrock footballer.

⁴¹ *WG*, 20 May 1892.

⁴² *WG*, 26 July 1895.

the Pakenham Hall XI of Lord Longford's demesne and the Castlepollard Commercial Club in 1902 for example the Countess of Longford invited all the players into the castle, 'where an excellently served tea was partaken of and a few hours spent in an enjoyable manner, songs, dances etc making the time pass merrily'.⁴³ The composition of these teams tended to change as the century progressed and their social exclusiveness became considerably diluted. An examination of the names of those playing on some of these teams would suggest that apart from the local gentry, tenant farmers, demesne labourers and domestic staff were included in the selections.

Westmeath had a number of schools that equated to the English model of the public school and formed 2.0 per cent of the total. A more detailed examination of the role of sport in these educational establishments is undertaken in Chapter 5.⁴⁴ The Ranelagh School Cricket Club featured in reports for ten of the years surveyed and the Farra School was also active. Cricket playing wasn't exclusively confined to the Protestant schools as the Irish Christian Brothers school, St Mary's College, in Mullingar, also participated. A contemporary account of the game as played at Farra School illustrates its rudimentary nature and the difficulty in playing in poorly maintained fields. In Farra the 'cricket was never good and hardly popular'. The pitch was just stumps in a field and all the instruction given 'was to play straight-forward and low at balls that might be short'. When a 'sixer was swiped' it took 'half the other side to find the ball, so deep was the outfield in pasture unequalled for the production of beef and milk'.⁴⁵

Teams associated with the workplace made up 3.00 per cent of the total. The distinction has been made between clubs organised and supported by management and proprietors and clubs formed by groups of men sharing the same workplace without paternalist support. Support of sport by paternalist employers was by no means unique in the Irish situation.⁴⁶ In Portlaw, county Waterford, the paternalist Quaker family of Malcomson supported with financial contribution and a range of

⁴³ *WE*, 20 Sept, 1902.

⁴⁴ See Chapter 5,

⁴⁵ Shan F. Bullock, *After Sixty Years*, London, 1936, 78-79.

⁴⁶ Malcolm Brodie, *Linfield: 100 years*, Belfast, 1985, 3-4. Two of Ireland's foremost association football clubs owed some of their initial success to company support. The Distillery club in Belfast was formed in 1879 from employees of Dunville's distillery. The Linfield club was originally formed in 1886 from workers at the Ulster Spinning Company's Linfield Mill.

facilities an assortment of social provision that included the Mayfield Cricket Club, for the employees of their cotton plant, in the 1860s.⁴⁷ In Westmeath, the Athlone Woollen Mills is worthy of particular note as the members benefited from the industrial paternalism of the proprietors. The Smith family organised a range of sporting and recreational activities for its employees that are considered in more detail in Chapter 5.⁴⁸ This was the only example of industrial paternalism operating within the county; the other teams with a workplace association were organisations founded from groups of men who shared employment networks. The Mullingar Mental Asylum XI, the United Banks XI, Shaw's XI and the Killucan (Railway) Station Cricket Club were examples of this type of team. The latter had sufficient members interested in the game in 1898, to organise matches between their first and second elevens and operated as a properly constituted club.⁴⁹

The voluntary association fielded cricket teams as a means of broadening their social curriculum. Included in this category are the Athlone Brass Band XI, the Father Matthew Hall XI, the teams of Castlepollard, Killucan and Mullingar Working-men's clubs and the Catholic Commercial cricket clubs of Mullingar and Castlepollard. This group formed 4.0 per cent of the total.

Finally, the largest category of team identified from the newspaper survey represented the villages, parishes and town-lands scattered across the county. These teams formed 68.00 per cent of the total that were active in the period. While some of these were certainly associated with landed estates their number and range is far too great for them to be considered as gentry organised and supported teams only. Neighbourhood relationships were a crucial element in bringing men together to play cricket just as in an urban setting they brought men together to play football in a entirely different context between 1875-1900 in Birmingham, Liverpool, Blackburn and Stirling.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Tom Hunt, *Portlaw, county Waterford, 1825-1876: portrait of an industrial village and its cotton industry*, Dublin, 2000, 45.

⁴⁸ See chapter 5.

⁴⁹ *MR*, 1 Sept. 1898.

⁵⁰ Richard Holt, 'Working class football and the city', in *The British Journal of Sports History*, 3 (1), 1986, 7-8.

Diffusion of cricket

Diffusion theory has been used in a number of studies to explain the introduction and growth of sport to an area.⁵¹ The theory can also be used to explain the spread of cricket in county Westmeath. Neighbourhood or contagious diffusion is one aspect of the theory whereby an idea is introduced to an area and is then adopted by others in the locality. Hierarchical diffusion is also important in which a new idea spread from the top of the hierarchy to the bottom or from the most important members of society to the least influential.⁵² Cricket was hierarchically diffused in Westmeath, in a manner that parallels the pattern identified by Hignell for the spread of cricket in Monmouthshire and Clarke in Cornwall.⁵³ The Westmeath County Cricket Club, was the earliest regular practitioner of the game in the county, during the 1850s. There was a second club, the Kilbeggan Border Union, active in Kilbeggan throughout the 1850s and 1860s. In the 1860s, the game began to spread down the social ladder as a result mainly of the actions of the landed gentry. Members of the gentry who were particularly active in the game began to organise their own teams and also promoted country-house cricket. A number of reasons have been suggested to explain why the gentry arranged fixtures against teams from other estates and sides assembled by other gentlemen. It offered the landowner an opportunity to impose his presence and authority and offered a chance to renew old friendships and to keep up-to date with the latest gossip, scandal and intrigue. The game also enabled personal rivalries to be acted out in a risk-free environment and provided a means of entertainment, exercise and excitement.⁵⁴ Amongst the members of the gentry to organise their own sides during this stage were Mr Fetherstonhaugh, Captain Nugent, Mr Hornridge, Mr Hudson, Mr Dease of Turbotstown and Major Moore.⁵⁵

Some of these individuals attributed a moral value to the promotion of the game. In August 1862, Fetherstonhaugh attracted attention for 'encouraging among the young men in his extensive employment such a manly pastime as cricket'.⁵⁶ According to a

⁵¹ M Huggins, 'The spread of Association Football in North-East England, 1876-90: the pattern of diffusion' in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 6, 1989, 299-318. Andrew Hignell, *Rain stops play*, London, 2002, 37-54, Ian David Clarke, 'The development and social history of cricket in Cornwall 1815 to 1881, unpublished PhD thesis, De Montfort University, Leicester, May 2004.

⁵² Hignell, *Rain stops play*, 37-8.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 51.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 17.

⁵⁵ *WG*, 12 Sept. 1861; 29 May 1862; 13 August 1863; 10 August 1865; 9 August 1866.

⁵⁶ *WG*, 21 August 1862.

report in Lawrence's handbook, his chief objective was the 'very commendable one of promoting cricket amongst the labouring classes of the locality, with a hope that it would tend to promote friendly feelings amongst all grades'.⁵⁷ James Perry made a similar intervention when he established the Belmont Club in King's county. In this district, cricket was unknown until the spring of 1864 when Perry got 'a few of the country natives to practise every fine evening and they liked the game extremely'.⁵⁸ The game was mainly played by the labouring class whose chief defect was an

Absence of discipline and the presence of a person in authority was at first quite necessary to disallow the natural ardour for converting bats into the more genial shillelagh.⁵⁹

At this time also a number of business people were involved in the game. William Kelly, manager of the Hibernian Bank in Mullingar was one such individual who occasionally organised his own side and also acted as secretary for the Mullingar club.⁶⁰ These individuals expressed their newly acquired wealth and rising social standing by becoming involved with cricket clubs in the towns, an activity that allowed them to rub shoulders with the leaders of local society and business.⁶¹ These ambitious white-collar workers used the cricket club and other sports clubs as a means of bettering themselves socially and establishing respectability.

The 1880s was the decade when shopkeepers, tenant farmers, small businessmen and commercial clerks became involved in the game. Developments in Mullingar illustrate this aspect of diffusion where teams such as the Mullingar Commercial Club, the Mullingar Catholic Commercial Club, the Mullingar Wanderers and the Mullingar Shamrocks Club were active and catered for different social groupings. The clerks and shop assistants of the town's retail sector dominated the Catholic Commercial Club's membership. In its ranks were

⁵⁷ Lawrence, *Handbook*, 1866-67, 90.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 73.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 73.

⁶⁰ *WG*, 14 August 1862.

⁶¹ Hignell, *Rain stops play*, 52.

A number of young men who working hard behind counters throughout the other six days of the week and can join in the invigorating pastime on their idle day. Men who toil over accounts all these days and men who are employed in other diverse occupations, in fact, the club is open to all.⁶²

The Mullingar Commercial Club was more elitist, and catered for the employer and professional classes of the town. The team that played in the August 1894 match against Ballymahon Cricket Club, for example, included three Shaw brothers of the family retail business, in Earl Street, Mullingar.⁶³ It also included E. S. Anderson, the sub-sheriff, Dr W. Middleton, J. Newburn, a farmer and land agent, A.D. Maxwell of the Ulster Bank and Percy Muldowney, the professional and caretaker of the cricket ground. The team for the return game also featured Dr Ledwith and T.C. Foster, headmaster of the Farra School.⁶⁴ Gradually, as the interest of the gentry in cricket declined the members of this club and social class began to feature regularly on the county cricket side. The Athlone Cricket and Lawn Tennis Club, mentioned in the previous chapter, exhibited a similar socio-occupational structure in Athlone.

The final stage of hierarchical diffusion occurred in the 1890s when the game became firmly established in the rural areas of east Westmeath in particular where it became the favourite sporting pastime of farmers and farm labourers. At this stage neighbourhood or contagious diffusion became important as the game spread through the rural districts. This development is best illustrated within the parish of Killucan where as many as seventeen different clubs were active at some stage in the period 1880-1905.

It is possible to illustrate with specific examples, the process by which cricket was hierarchically diffused by tracing the means by which cricket spread from the exclusive Westmeath County Club, via the Castlepollard Club to finally the rural club of Ringtown, an organisation of farmers, labourers and skilled tradesmen. Individual influence was the crucial factor. The Westmeath County Club in the 1866-67 season included in its ranks J. R. Whitestone and E. F. Hickson.⁶⁵ These gentlemen were, in turn, two of the founders of the Castlepollard Cricket Club, the former acting as club

⁶² *WE*, 15 Sept. 1883.

⁶³ *WG*, 30 August 1894; Slater, *Directory*, 1891, 192.

⁶⁴ *WG*, 8 September 1894.

⁶⁵ Lawrence, *Handbook*, 1866-67, 88-90.

captain and the latter as club secretary, in 1867. The club, with a membership of thirty, was reported to have owed much of its success to the kindness of Whitestone, who worked to establish a first class club in the neighbourhood.⁶⁶ This club included in its ranks Denis Smith who in turn established the Ringtown Club and acted as its captain and patron by providing a suitable playing field in his 193 acre farm.⁶⁷ Smith had held the position of captain 'for many years' when he tendered his resignation in May 1892.⁶⁸ In 1899, a number of clubs were established in Castlepollard where cricket was reported to have 'taken a hold of the young men'. This began when the 'young labouring men' formed the Castlepollard Workingmen's Club in July 1899.⁶⁹ A second club was started later in August when the Commercial Cricket Club was established. This club was 'composed chiefly of men who were debarred from joining the W.C.C. on the grounds of being non-workmen' but was 'in no way antagonistic' to the latter.⁷⁰ At the same time the Pakenhamhall Club and the Kiltoom Club catered for the workers on the Longford demesne in Castlepollard.

The role of the military

This model of diffusion excludes the military as an important agent of diffusion. The importance of the military, as cricket proselytisers, has been well documented but without any quantitative data to support the proposition. The evidence from this study would suggest that military importance was limited and decreased over time. In the period between 1850-1879, of the games reported, in which opposition was identified, 22.31 per cent featured a military combination against a civilian selection and 1.56 per cent of matches were inter-regimental. Of the 955 games documented for the period 1880-1905, 122 (12.77 per cent) involved garrison teams against civilian teams and another 22 games (2.32 per cent) were inter-regimental.⁷¹ Military importance had declined completely after 1897, when the problems associated with the South African war, resulted in the reduction in numbers of military personnel in Mullingar and Athlone. At this time also soccer was considerably more popular with the

⁶⁶ Lawrence, *Handbook*, 1867-68, 100-101.

⁶⁷ VO, Valuation lists: county Westmeath, district of Delvin, electoral division of Faughalstown, 1860-1940, valuation revision 1884-1898, 15. This land was valued at £155. Smith held a second farm of land of 40 acres, valued at £26. 6s. at Streamstown., 16.

⁶⁸ *WN*, 14 May 1892.

⁶⁹ *WE*, 5 Aug. 1899.

⁷⁰ *WE*, 26 Aug. 1899.

⁷¹ The figure refers to the number of games where the opposition was identified.

Westmeath based regiments as will be shown in Chapter 5. In the period between 1898-1905, 355 games were reported in the county and only six of these involved teams representing military personnel. The variation in the importance of the military in providing opposition for civilian teams is illustrated in Table 24.

	1850-59	1860-69	1870-79	1880-89	1890-99	1900-05
Army opposition	6	37	15	57	60	10
Total games	17	175	61	268	444	283
% total	35.29	20.12	24.59	21.26	13.51	3.53

Table 24: Importance of army combinations in providing opposition for civilian combinations in the period 1850-1905.

Athlone and Mullingar army garrisons were faced with a number of constraints that limited their role as cricket ambassadors. Army personnel had a full programme of summer manoeuvres that sometimes involved relocation to the Curragh or other areas during the cricket season. The 2nd Battalion of Loyal North Lancashire Regiment for instance, was stationed in the Curragh for their annual manoeuvres from mid-June until mid-August 1895.⁷² The turnover of regiments was also frequent which reduced the potential for ambassadorial impact. From April 1865 to January 1905, thirty-three different regiments were based at the Mullingar army barracks, giving an average tour of duty of fourteen months and two weeks.⁷³ Not all regiments embraced cricket with the same enthusiasm. Its popularity amongst soldiers was second to football, being particularly popular in Guards regiments mainly due to its place in the rural upper class and public school culture of aristocrats.⁷⁴

The evidence from Westmeath suggests that army personnel in Athlone and Mullingar played a facilitatory rather than promotional role where cricket was concerned. The primary role of military cricket teams was to provide opposition to the elite county combinations or to the combinations of individual members of the landed gentry. In 1862, for instance, the Athlone Garrison provided the opposition for the Westmeath County club on three occasions; in 1871 the 97th Regiment featured on the list of

⁷² *WG*, 14 June 1895; 16 August 1895.
⁷³ Patricia Gibney, ‘The Military in Mullingar’, Research project presented to the Department of History, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, unpublished, 1998, 15-23.
⁷⁴ Campbell, ‘Sport and the army’, 47-8.

opponents on four occasions; in 1892 the East Lancashire Regiment played matches against the Westmeath County Club and on three occasions against the selection of Percy O'Reilly from Coolamber.⁷⁵ In the 1850s and 1860s prior to the development of a dedicated cricket venue by the county club, the availability of the army grounds was also an important factor in facilitating cricket matches. In return, cricket in a manner similar to hunting, presented army officers with an introduction and integration to county society.

Teams from the lower orders of society also sourced army opposition. The working class Athlone Woollen Mills team competed against the East Kent Regiment Band XI in 1893 and 1894 as well as the selection of the band of the Lancashire Fusiliers in 1895.⁷⁶ Officers and soldiers were also recruited for representative sides assembled by members of the gentry. Corporal Woods and Private Clarke for example represented the county Westmeath club in a game against Kilbeggan in which Clarke made over forty runs.⁷⁷ The gaiety of the occasion of several cricket matches was also considerably enhanced by the musical entertainment supplied by regimental bands. Military garrisons thus complemented participation, and elite participation in particular, in sport. Officers arrived in Mullingar and Athlone well versed in the sporting recreations of England and it was natural that they would have continued these recreations at their Irish bases. These recreational habits brought with them entry into county society and its social world.

Cricket's attractions

Cricket's popularity in Westmeath from the 1890s with the farming and labouring classes is explained by a number of factors. Firstly, the sport was practically free of any serious competition from other sports and therefore, in rural areas, it offered the only opportunity to participate in organised recreation. Time constraints, cost and social exclusion prevented access to other forms of recreation. In the larger towns, it proved similarly attractive to the clerks and shop assistants whose social and economic status excluded them from membership of tennis and golf clubs. Cricket at this stage was not associated with a particular political or anti-national identity. Its

⁷⁵ *WG*, 29 May 1862, 5 June 1862, 21 August 1862. Lawrence, *Handbook*, 1871-72, *WN*, 19 May, 1892, 26 May 1892; *WG*, 27 May 1892, 8 July 1892.

⁷⁶ *WI*, 13 May 1893; 9 June 1894, *WE*, 9 May 1895.

⁷⁷ *The Lilywhites' Gazette* (Journal of the 2nd Brigade East Lancashire Regiment), 1 Aug. 1890, viii, 8.

identity was as an activity associated with the socially elite and as such its connotations were positive in that it presented the lower classes an opportunity to participate in a recreational activity associated with the rich and powerful. Land League activities in Westmeath had little impact and according to one commentator the land war in the county 'was little more than an opportunity for verbal heroics on the part of a small but committed group of townsmen, priests and farmers; the history of the leagues in the county exhibited the solidarity of the agricultural classes but the indifference of the majority of farmers to both nationalism and the wants and desires of labourers'.⁷⁸

The decline of the GAA after 1893 meant that the opportunity that rural dwellers had to participate in football was no longer available. Even when football was popular it was essentially a winter-spring activity that complemented the cricket season and there was seasonal interaction between individuals in both sports. The reaction of the members of the Mullingar Football Club following their victory in the Westmeath football championship in 1892 provides a good example of this process. The football club members announced that they would not be playing any more matches until the new season. Instead, they reassembled at Michael Doherty's premises, on 20 May 1892 'with the object of taking steps for the formation a representative Mullingar cricket club'. Of the nineteen listed who attended the meeting nine played in the county football final. Membership of the club was designed to make it accessible to the less wealthy employees. It required an entrance fee of one shilling, followed by a 6d. subscription for the first week, and 3d. weekly thereafter.⁷⁹ A four-month cricket season could be enjoyed for an investment of five shillings in membership fees. The gentlemen of the county club paid eight times as much for their cricket pleasures.

Cricket was relatively cheap for participants. Rural clubs purchased the necessary equipment, which was then communally owned, and this reduced the cost of participation to the individual. This methodology of organisation is suggested by the publication of an advertisement from the Mornington Cricket Club in March 1904. Owing to dissension between members, the club offered for sale its equipment of two

⁷⁸ A.C. Murray, 'Nationality and local politics in late nineteenth-century Ireland: the case of county Westmeath, in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxv, 98, 1986, 157.

⁷⁹ *WN*, 12 May, 19 May 1892.

new playing bats, two new practice bats, a set of wickets and bails that were never used, a pair of shin guards and a new cricket book.⁸⁰ The more elite clubs, also used this method to organise their equipment. The minute book of the Carrick-on-Suir Athletic, Cricket and Football club from county Tipperary contains a number of references to decisions made by the committee to purchase equipment that included ‘a pair of match bats that were badly wanting’ and later a match ball ‘for the intended Rockwell engagement’.⁸¹ Tennis clubs also purchased equipment for the benefit of their members although the players of Athlone Tennis and Cricket Club had this facility withdrawn in July 1886. A motion was passed that members buy balls from the club at half of the cost price as over half of the balls supplied by the club were lost. It was believed that this change ‘will encourage members to be more careful with club property’.⁸²

Apart from the opportunity that the game presented to all classes to engage in sporting contest, cricket also played an important role in promoting social interaction between equals. The socialisation was an integral part of the game. Matches between civilian and military selections provided the focus of socialisation between members of county society. This dimension was most important for the Westmeath gentry in the 1860s, with the annual weeklong visit to Dublin that included a game against the Vice-Regal lodge, the social highlight. The club was founded in the mid-1850s by the Liberal earl of Carlisle, a genial bachelor noted for his generosity.⁸³ These games inevitably drew together the elite of Dublin and county society. In the 1864 match with Westmeath ‘his excellency was in the scoring tent’ and the ‘usual vice-regal hospitalities were dispensed with’. The musical selection of the band of the 14th Regiment entertained ‘a large collection of the fashionables’.⁸⁴ The social flavour of these occasions is suggested in the report of the activities that followed the game between Mullingar and Kilbeggan in June 1862.⁸⁵ After the game

⁸⁰ *WE*, 5 March 1904.

⁸¹ Minute book of Carrick-on-Suir Athletic, Cricket and Football Club, established around 1879, minute of 27 May 1881 and 28 June 1881. This was the club of one of the founders of the GAA, Maurice Davin and his brother the noted athlete, Tom Davin. Minute book held privately.

⁸² *WI*, 31 July 1886.

⁸³ Joseph Robins, *Champagne and silver buckets, the Viceregal court and at Dublin Castle, 1700-1922*, Dublin, 2001, 133-35.

⁸⁴ *WG*, 21 July 1864.

⁸⁵ *WG*, 19 June 1862.

At seven o'clock in the evening the players, with other guests, to the number of forty, sat down to a sumptuous dinner-embracing all the delicacies of the season-provided by the Kilbeggan Club, with their usual and well known liberality. When ample justice had been done to the viands, the cloth was removed, and the "rosy god" made her appearance. A variety of toasts – including the health of her Majesty, received with "three times three, and one cheer more"...several songs were given in good style.

Social interaction was not limited to players as members of the local gentry, army officers and females attended the elite games. The Westmeath-Kilbeggan game in 1862 attracted 'some of the elite among the fair sex of the county' who 'graced the ground with their presence and thus added much to the beauty of the scene'.⁸⁶ The match between the Westmeath County Club and the Royal Irish Rifles in June 1890 took place in a field 'at the rere [sic] of the Asylum premises' during which the band of the Rifles 'played a capital selection of music' and from 'a spacious marquee' constructed in the field, hospitality was dispensed in lavish manner.⁸⁷ Members of the landed gentry organised some novelty matches with a very definite social agenda in the early 1900s. A match between the sporting spinsters and the bold bachelors was organised at the Mullingar Polo grounds at an 'at home' given by Mrs Watson-Murray. In this match the bachelors played left handed and batted with broom-sticks 'alias pick handles'.⁸⁸ A year later many of the sporting spinsters assembled at Knockdrin Castle where Miss Montgomery's XI challenged the XI of Miss Levigne.

The role played by cricket, in providing a focus around which likeminded people could assemble, declined in importance as the century progressed for the elite members of society, but its importance increased for the less wealthy. As shown in earlier chapters, polo and lawn tennis provided alternative social *foci*. At parish level, the cricket club became the promoter of social events that provided a celebratory focal point for local communities. In the absence of other social or sporting *foci*, cricket clubs became the chief and perhaps the only vehicle for promoting formal occasions of social intercourse in some rural areas. The annual ball normally held towards the end of the year was the most important and elaborate of these events but other social events were organised in the course of a season. The Mount Street (Mullingar), Turin, Killucan, Cloghan, Clonhugh, Killucan Station, Wardenstown and Ringtown clubs all

⁸⁶ *WI*, 2 Aug. 1862.

⁸⁷ *WG*, 27 June 1890.

⁸⁸ *WG*, 20 Sept 1901.

organised dances, quadrille parties and pre or end of season balls during the 1890s and early 1900s.⁸⁹ A variety of venues was used to stage these events including the Market House in Mullingar, national schoolrooms provided by the supportive Parish Priest, Workingmen's clubs halls, residences of local farmers and in the case of the Clonhugh club 'the tastefully arranged barn' placed at the 'disposal of the committee by Lord Greville'.⁹⁰ The Killucan Station Cricket Club held its first season quadrille party in the Rathwire National School placed at their disposal by Fr Kelsh P. P., and was attended by sixty-eight guests.⁹¹ The Wardenstown club's inaugural event in 1893 attracted eighty couples who 'plied the light fantastic with vim and vigour until morning well had proclaimed its advent'.⁹² Thirty-five ladies attended the Turin ball.⁹³ Food and refreshments were integral to these events and music for dancing was supplied by either local musicians or dance bands specifically hired for the occasion, depending on the club's circumstances. The band of the Inniskilling Fusiliers provided the music for the Mount Street Club at which forty couples reportedly attended. These events provided a new secular ritual calendar and were important in maintaining club dynamics in a sport that was strictly seasonal.⁹⁴ Members were conscious of the importance of social occasions in establishing respectability. This aspect was clearly set out in the report of the Mount Street ball, which stated that

As proficient and efficient as the Club showed themselves to be as wielders of the willow, in providing amusement and for a display of downright hospitality and good fellowship they are greater adepts.⁹⁵

These events drew their inspiration from the annual hunt ball that provided the social highlight for the hunting community and the elite of county society, and their organisation was in part inspired by the desire for the members of these clubs to establish themselves as communities of respectable sporting gentlemen.

An examination of published lists of those who attended these events gives an indication of their appeal for the less exalted members of society and their importance

⁸⁹ *WE*, 24 Feb. 1900, *MR*, 5 Jan. 1899, *WE*, 17 Dec. 1896, 27 Nov. 1902, *WG*, 28 Oct. 1893, *WN*, 13 April 1899, *WN*, 19 Jan. 1893, *WN*, 17 June 1897,

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *WE*, 13 April 1899.

⁹² *WN*, 19 Jan. 1893.

⁹³ *MR*, 5 Jan. 1899.

⁹⁴ Lowerson, *Sport*, 98.

⁹⁵ *WE*, 24 Feb. 1900.

in providing a social outlet for this group. The names of ninety-eight different people who attended the balls of the Ringtown, Turin and Cloghan clubs were published in the local press. It was possible to match fifty-eight of these people with completed census enumerators' forms from the 1901 census. Thirty single women who attended were identified with an average age of 24.62 years and of an age ranging from seventeen to thirty-six. These were some of the better off females of the districts concerned as thirteen (43.3 per cent) were from social class Biii and 11 (36.6 per cent) were from class Ci. These were farmers' daughters or were women who used some level of skill in their chosen occupation. These were mainly women who worked as seamstresses or as dressmakers. Many were also farmers' daughters. Only four members of social class D attended. Twenty single male attendees were identified with an age range from sixteen to thirty-eight years with an average age of 22.47 years.⁹⁶ The majority were farm labourers from social class D (50 per cent) with seven farmers' sons from class Biii (35 per cent) also present. A scholar, a shop assistant and a kennel-man were also present. Based on the evidence from this sample study and given the rigid social hierarchy that existed in rural areas at the time the social intercourse promoted by these events was likely to have been somewhat circumscribed. In the words of one historian 'the widest gap in rural Ireland was that between the farmer and the landless labourer, and marriage rarely, if ever, bridged that gap'.⁹⁷

Cricket also encouraged an informal socialisation that revolved around the game. Some sense of the fun and enjoyment associated with participation in the game is captured in a newspaper account of the journey made by the men of Ringtown to play a match against Stonehall. In July 1893, members of the club assembled on the shores of Lough Derravaragh to make the journey across the lake to play a match against Stonehall. Thirty-two members of the club climbed on board 'a large boat, kindly placed at their disposal by a local turf merchant'. After what was described as a delightful half-hours sail, 'during which songs were sung and music rendered', the members arrived at the Stonehall grounds and dispensed with the challenge presented by the home team.⁹⁸ This image of a turf-boat full of singing and dancing young men

⁹⁶ In both the categories of single male and female one thirteen year old student attended in each case.

⁹⁷ Hill, *Women*, 21.

⁹⁸ *WE*, 29 July 1893.

from rural Westmeath on their way to a pre-arranged cricket game is one that is not normally associated with ‘the quintessentially English game’. It was, however, very much the reality for the young men of the county, who throughout the 1890s used whatever transport was feasible to facilitate participation in their favoured sport. It is also an image that illustrates the role played by cricket in bringing much-needed colour to local communities.

It was also a traditional part of the game to partake with liquid refreshments of the alcoholic variety in the course of the game, in particular between innings. This was an aspect of the game that concerned ‘Short Slip’ in a letter to the *Westmeath Guardian* in June 1888⁹⁹. The letter emphasised the importance of continuing this tradition

It has hitherto been the custom with country clubs to provide luncheon and a half-barrel of porter for the visitors; which entailed expense to such a degree, as to deter clubs from engaging in no more than a few matches during a season. Now as a good many matches is what most players desire, I would suggest that the luncheon be left out, and a half-barrel of porter alone be supplied: each player providing his luncheon; which would be equally as satisfactory and a great deal cheaper than the other way.

The participation of marching bands, which became an important part of the ritual of GAA matches in the 1900s, was also a feature of some working class cricket matches.

Managing and financing clubs

Evidence on how clubs were organised, financed and managed is lacking for county Westmeath. Officers were elected annually and day-to-day management of club affairs was vested in a committee elected at the annual general meeting. The *Westmeath Independent* carried a report on the formation of the Ballymahon Club in 1865 and this offers an insight into the organisation of the early clubs.¹⁰⁰ In addition to the general committee this club also elected a subscription committee and a playing committee. Individual patrons formed the lifeblood of all sporting clubs and events. The Ballymahon Club had a subscription list of twenty-one contributors who subscribed sums ranging from £2 each by the King-Harman’s to the 10s. each from nine lesser landowners. The earlier examples from hunting highlighted the importance

⁹⁹ *WG*, 8 June 1888.

¹⁰⁰ *WI*, 13 May 1865.

of individuals in sourcing funds for sporting organisations. The members of the Westmeath County Club identified this aspect of Major Moore's contribution to the club at his farewell testimonial in November 1866. He was feted for 'not only procuring but generously contributing to the funds necessary for the maintenance of the club'.¹⁰¹ In its first seven months of existence the Carrick-on-Suir Athletic and Cricket Club had an income of £81. 6s.¹⁰² The majority of this was provided by membership fees of £37 10s. Donations by various aristocrats and landed gentry provided a further £11 and gate money and sale of cards for the clubs athletic sports amounted to £21.¹⁰³ Clubs of this stature were in a position to rent a playing arena and construct a pavilion, and investment in these items cost the club £32 over this period.¹⁰⁴

Patronage was essential to the survival of the cricket club. The most important form of patronage was the provision of a suitable ground. It has been assumed that gentry patronage was central to the games spread and survival but landlord's weren't alone in providing patronage. The farmer who allowed access to his land was equally important but suitable pieces of ground were organised from a variety of sources. The gentlemen of Athlone were facilitated for their return match against the Clonmacnoise XI in August 1867 'by the Colonel of the 2nd Queens who let them have the sick horse field for the day'.¹⁰⁵ Lord Longford provided the ground annually for the various Castlepollard teams.¹⁰⁶ Lord Greville defrayed the cost of the necessary appliances for the carrying out of the game for the Clonhugh Club in the 1893 season.¹⁰⁷ John Scally provided the ground for the Wardenstown Cricket Club for Sunday matches during the many years the club was in existence.¹⁰⁸ Ned Holdwright, a farmer also provided a

¹⁰¹ *WG*, 15 Nov. 1866.

¹⁰² Income and Expenditure of Carrick-on-Suir Amateur Athletic Cricket and Football Club from its formation August 1879 up to its first general meeting, February 23 1880.

¹⁰³ These included the Marquis of Waterford, Lord Charles Beresford, Lord Arthur Butler and the Earl of Bessborough. Over £10 was received on subscription cards and entrance fees received for the athletic sports amounted to £1. 8s. 6d.

¹⁰⁴ The club paid £24 annually in rent for its field and recouped some of this money by renting the grazing rights of the land. A minute of 27 May 1881 recorded the fact that Michael Quirke offer of £1 for the grazing of the field for four days was accepted provided he paid a man at his own expense to keep cattle off the cricket crease and also to take away what dung that might be dropped near the crease.

¹⁰⁵ *WI*, 31 Aug. 1867.

¹⁰⁶ *WE*, 20 June 1903.

¹⁰⁷ *WG*, 28 Oct. 1893.

¹⁰⁸ *MR*, 9 Aug. 1900.

crease for the club.¹⁰⁹ The Kilbeggan Willow Club shared the use of a ground with the Belmont Club with the permission of Eugene Gannon.¹¹⁰ James Cleary supported the Cloghan Club in a similar manner.¹¹¹ H. L. Pilkington, J. P. placed his grounds at the disposal of the Tyrrellspass team. The Killucan Station Cricket club benefited from the patronage of their president G. J. Boyan, P. L. G., who supplied 'liberal luncheon' and placed his grounds at the club disposal for practice and matches.¹¹² The Kilbride National Cricket Club were based 'on the beautiful back lawn adjoining the ancient castle of Kilbride, the residence of Mr James King, J. P.'¹¹³ Clerical support was also forthcoming on occasions. The Wardenstown Cricket Club were beneficiaries of the support of the nationalist parish priest Fr Kelsh and his 'young curate' Fr Johnson. When the club played against the M. P. O'Brien's team from Edenderry, Fr Kelsh 'sent a handsome present on the occasion' and his curate 'contributed a bright one out of his purse'. The proprietor of the Wardenstown estate Mrs Vandaleur and the local doctor Dr McGrane, also supported this particular occasion.¹¹⁴

Cricket clubs did not confine their extra-curricular activities to the organisation of entertainment for their members and associates. A number of Westmeath clubs also became promoters of athletic sports events ostensibly as a means of fund-raising for their primary activities but their importance in establishing status was equally important. Finance from these events was generated by charging entry fees to individual events, by levying fees on carriages and cars entering the grounds and by charging for entry to a reserved enclosure. The members of Mullingar Commercial Cricket Club held their inaugural sports on the grounds of Westmeath County Cricket Club at Ballinderry in October 1885.¹¹⁵ The first athletic sports meeting held in Delvin was organised by the members of the town's cricket club in October 1886.¹¹⁶ The Moate Cricket Club athletic sports of September 1887 presented a programme of twenty events and featured an appearance by one of the outstanding middle-distance athletes of the day, Tom Conneff. The band of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers attended

¹⁰⁹ *WN*, 27 Aug. 1891.

¹¹⁰ *WE*, 26 Aug. 1899.

¹¹¹ *WE*, 20 Sept. 1902.

¹¹² *MR*, 1 Sept. 1898.

¹¹³ *WG*, 2 Aug. 1889.

¹¹⁴ *WN*, 27 Aug. 1891.

¹¹⁵ *WG*, 9 October 1885

¹¹⁶ *WG*, 5 Nov. 1886

and provided the musical entertainment.¹¹⁷ On at least one notable occasion the members of the Mullingar Cricket Club determined ‘that the most strenuous efforts be made to prevent the holding of athletic sports on our grounds at Ballinderry’. The members believed that the holding the sports would result in very considerable damage to them no matter what precautions were taken.¹¹⁸

Socio-occupational background of cricket players

The purpose of this section is to carry out a detailed examination of the players who were involved in the game of cricket in the period between 1900-1902. The names of players appearing for twenty-two clubs listed in the newspapers were collated and analysed. The clubs included seven with a link to urban areas with the remainder representative of rural Westmeath. A data base was constructed on each player identified that contained details extracted from the enumerators’ census forms of 1901 and the occupation listed in the census form was used to categorise the social class of the players using the classification as explained in the introduction. In total 227 (72.75 per cent) players out of a total of 312 were positively identified. The analysis of the members of these clubs by social class is illustrated in Table 25.

The ages of the sampled players ranged between fifty and fifteen with the majority, 65.7 per cent, aged twenty-five years of age or less. Cricket was the preserve of the young man with 44.6 per cent of the playing population aged between twenty and twenty-five years of age and a further 21.1 per cent were teenagers. Of the cohort aged over twenty-five years 15.5 per cent were less than thirty and 18.8 per cent aged thirty or over. The average age of the Westmeath cricket player was 24.63 years of age but this figure is distorted by the presence in the sample of a few individuals in their late forties and early fifties. In Westmeath, 44.4 per cent were twenty-two or under and if the cricket players aged thirty-one years and older are excluded the average age of the player is reduced to 22.53 years of age.

¹¹⁷ *WG*, 16 Sept. 1887; *WE*, 17 Sept 1887.

¹¹⁸ *WE*, 20 Sept. 1894.

	Sample	A	B	Bi	Bii	Biii	C	Ci	Cii	Ciii	D	U
Belvedere	12	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8	4
Boher	11	1	2	-	-	2	2	2	-	-	3	3
C'pollard Comm. CC	21	-	1	-	-	1	8	3	4	1	2	10
Castlpollard Wolfe Town	11	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	5	5
Clonhugh	16	-	1	-	-	1	4	4	-	-	8	3
Cloghan	21	-	7	-	-	7	-	-	-	-	1	13
Craddenstown	15	-	7	-	-	7	3	-	-	-	4	1
Delvin	11	-	1	-	-	1	3	-	2	1	5	2
Derryrow	15	-	5	-	-	5	-	-	-	-	8	2
Fennor	12	-	5	-	-	5	-	-	-	-	4	3
Kilbeggan CC	19	-	7	1	1	5	9	4	2	3	1	2
Kilbeggan WCCC	15	-	-	-	-	-	3	1	2	-	10	2
Kiltoom	13	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	10	2
Moate CC	15	1	2	-	1	1	5	3	2	-	3	4
Mount St. CC	13	-	1	-	1	-	4	3	1	-	2	6
Newtown	10	1	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	5	3
Pakenhamhall	15	-	1	-	-	1	2	1	-	1	9	3
Raharney	11	-	3	-	-	3	3	3	-	-	3	2
Stonehall	11	-	2	-	1	1	2	1	-	1	5	2
Turbotstown	11	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	2	8
Tyrrellspass	17	-	4	-	-	4	5	3	2	-	6	2
Wardenstown	17	-	8	-	1	7	2	2	-	-	4	3
Total	312	3	59				57				108	85

Table 25: Social classes of participants of selected cricket clubs in Westmeath 1900-1902.

The game was also dominated by those of the Catholic faith who formed 90.2 per cent of participants with members of the Church of Ireland accounting for 9.7 per cent. One person involved in the sport was returned as Wesleyan as was one Presbyterian. The sport was almost totally the preserve of the single man with 89.25 per cent of the sample unmarried according to the information recorded in the census forms. At the

end of the nineteenth century marriage brought new responsibilities, expenses and commitments for the cricket playing classes. The amount of money available for investment in social and recreational activities declined accordingly.

Analysing the group by social class shows that cricket drew its participants from across the social classes but was dominated by players from social class D who formed 47.57 per cent of the total. Farm labourers dominated, a group close to the bottom of the economic ladder and one of the most disadvantaged groups in Irish society. Social classes B and C were almost equally represented and formed 25.99 and 25.17 per cent of the total respectively. Farmers' sons dominated the former group and made up 77 per cent of its total with farmers forming a further 19 per cent. Members of social class A, the group that introduced the game to the county and initially dominated it, had practically disappeared from the institutionalised club game and formed only 1.32 per cent of the total. This result is markedly different to Tranter's findings for central Scotland where around one-third of all cricketers came from social classes A and B and over half originated in social class C. Representatives from social class D formed a modest 6.8 per cent of the total in Tranter's sample group.¹¹⁹

The data also allows for a detailed analysis of the social profile of individual clubs and a number of general trends emerge. Teams associated with landed demesnes exhibited the greatest variation in religious belief as might be expected. Of the twenty members of the Church of Ireland identified, nine were associated with the Pakenhamhall combination of Lord Longford's demesne. Twelve members of the club were identified and, of these, 64 per cent were members of the Church of Ireland. This religious affiliation of the members had a significant impact on the social class of the team, but not in the manner that might have been expected. The majority of members, 71.4 per cent, belonged to class D, a clear indication that the Pakenhamhall side was established by the Longford family to cater for the recreational needs of the Big House employees. Three other members of the Church of Ireland were also associated with teams from the Castlepollard area. Robert Barton, a gardener, was a member of the Castlepollard Commercial Club and two members of the Kiltoom Club

¹¹⁹ Tranter, 'Social and occupational structure', 43, 1987, 309.

were also Protestants. Kiltoom was a village where employees of the Pakenhamhall estate resided. The three individuals from social class A were also members of the Church of Ireland; Captain Barton of the Mosstown estate, a 'land agent and captain', promoted the Boher team and F. W. Russell, a 'gentleman farmer' was a member of the Moate Cricket Club. The other members of the Church of Ireland were from the Tyrrellspass region and included the Rev. McGinley, the only cricket playing vicar active at the time and who may have been the patron of the Newtown team.

More elite clubs were also active and included rural clubs such as Wardenstown and Cloghan which were dominated by farmers and the sons of farmers and the urban clubs such as the Moate Cricket Club, the Kilbeggan Cricket Club and the Mullingar based, Mount Street Club. The Moate Cricket Club was the most permanent and active of the more socially exclusive clubs in the period 1880-1905. It was also the club in 1901 that was most inclusive in terms of its social structure including members from social classes A and D. The club was first mentioned in match reports in 1884 and up to 1905 went unreported for games on only three years. The strength of the club was such that the AGM of 1893 decided to field a second team under the captaincy of William Reid, a former student of Blackrock School, Dublin. Moate Cricket Club possessed the essential features that provided permanency for the late Victorian sports club. It had a permanent and centrally located venue at its disposal, which was maintained and improved during the course of the period under review. The grounds located in the Fair Green were reportedly enlarged considerably for the 1895 season, and the following season a pavilion was erected, on 'the east side of the ground, commanding a full view of the playing arena'. Tuesday and Friday practice sessions were a regular feature.¹²⁰ A new ground was in use for the 1900 season on the lands of W.C. Clibborn JP, 'excellently laid out and if anything superior to the old ones'.¹²¹ The club was able to boast, in 1901, that its 'roll of membership was never so extensive' and that it was 'in a more prosperous condition than heretofore'.¹²² The club included in its ranks 'a professional cricketer', Mr Frank Doran whose brother fulfilled a similar function for the Ballinasloe Club in county Galway and both

¹²⁰ *WI*, 18 May 1895; 13 June 1896; 22 Aug. 1896.

¹²¹ *WI*, 16 June 1900.

¹²² *WI*, 27 July 1901.

represented Connacht in inter-provincial competition.¹²³ The social milieu of the club is evident from the spectators that attended some of its games. Those from the highest ranks of society were present on occasions of the club's games. Lord Castlemaine, F. T. Dames-Longworth (HML), Thomas Maher and 'a large assembly of the elite of the County Westmeath and the King's county' attended the game at Tullamore in August 1892.¹²⁴ The more socially exclusive clubs played matches against clubs of similar status. The opposition featured during this period is indicative of the club's position on the social hierarchy. The two busiest seasons of the Moate club were in 1895 and 1898 during which eight fixtures were fulfilled in each season. In 1895, the club had games against the County Westmeath Club, two against county Longford, two against the officers of the Lancashire Fusiliers and a single game against Mr Locke's XI. In the latter season, a similar programme was organised. The core membership of the club was drawn from social class Ci and Cii. The club also included a domestic servant, a general labourer from social class D, as well as F.W. Russell, a local landlord, in its ranks. The members of the club were older, having an average age of 26.6 years with a range that varied between seventeen and forty-eight years of age.

The rural clubs inevitably were formed from combinations of farmers, farmers' sons and farm labourers. The Wardenstown Club, however, was dominated by members of social class B and was dominated by farmers and their sons and skilled tradesmen from class C. Its playing membership ranged in age between nineteen and twenty-eight and had an average age of 23.54 years. Farm labourers, the group categorised as social class D, dominated a number of clubs. The identified members of the Belvedere team were all of class D, five of whom were residents of the Rochfort Demesne. This was the club of the Belvedere estate of Charles Marlay. The age of this group ranged between eighteen and thirty-nine and averaged 23.75. All were agricultural labourers and, with one exception, were single men. The Pakenhamhall and Kiltoom teams have already been mentioned and were directly associated with the Longford demesne. The ages of the former team ranged from eighteen-year-old stable boy and domestic servant N. Crawford to forty-four year old groom William McCann. The average age of this team was higher than average at 28.35 years. Kiltoom exhibited a similar social structure and included one of the oldest players sampled, fifty-one year old R. Scott,

¹²³ *WI*, 16 July 1892, 30 July 1892.

¹²⁴ *WI*, 6 Aug. 1892.

an unmarried farmer's son. This was also a team of single men and had an average age of 26.27. Another club dominated by men from social class D was that of Stonehall. The age of the members, all un-married, ranged between twenty-two and thirty-three and had an average age of 25.44. The Stonehall town-land was the resident place of two substantial farmers, Jeremiah Gibson and William McLoughlin, who were involved in sporting recreation. McLoughlin was a subscriber to the Westmeath Hunt Club and Gibson was one of the chief organisers of the annual Crookedwood athletic and aquatic sports. It is reasonable to assume that the Stonehall cricket team consisted of labourers from their farms and benefited from the patronage of one or both of the landed proprietors.

Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated the important role played by cricket in facilitating cross-class recreational and social intercourse especially during the 1880s and 1890s. This finding challenges the previously articulated historical orthodoxy as outlined in the introduction. Cricket did not decline in Westmeath after the 1870s nor was it an activity confined to the social elite. At the turn of the century cricket provided a recreational outlet for the farm labourer, a member of one of the most disadvantaged economic communities, at the time.

The recreational habits of the different social classes remain unexplored territory in Irish historiography and until additional quantitatively based studies of this type have been undertaken it will not be possible to contextualise the Westmeath situation. Reference has been made in the introduction to the specialised nature of the county's agricultural economy and this may have been a factor in the promotion of the game within the county. The Westmeath pattern of cricket is broadly similar to the pattern outlined by Bracken in Tipperary, although in the early 1900s, in Tipperary 'it was at the larger urban centres' that the game became focussed, 'although some rural locations remained active for a while'. Unlike in Westmeath, 'gone were the days of the ad hoc town-land or demesne teams'.¹²⁵ The evidence that cricket was more popular in the broadest sense of the term, that has hitherto been accepted is

¹²⁵ Bracken, *Foreign and fantastic*, 117.

conclusive. The popularity of the game in both counties may be indicative of a strong regional demarcation for the game.

Cricket did decline in popularity as a recreational activity for the landed gentry but this decline did not take place until the 1890s, almost twenty years later than is normally assumed. Members of this group did provide some of the patronage essential to the lower classes teams. As has been pointed out earlier this decline was partly related to the popularity of polo within the county. The development of this game initially at Mullingar and later at Moate and Castlepollard provided the landed gentry and higher status professionals with a managed social and recreational outlet that proved more attractive to the cricket-playing cohort of the landed gentry, than the peripatetic cricket. Tennis was also an alternative and provided a means of family recreation.

Cricket was the focus of socialisation for different groups and provided the opportunity for interaction between people of similar social standing ranging from the landed gentry to the agricultural labourer. This role had declined in importance for the members of the more elite groups at the end of the century but for members of the working class teams it was of central importance. The more organised of these clubs extended their seasonal range of activities by the organisation of social occasions that varied in the degree of formality displayed. For some individuals, the development of the GAA in the 1890s provided them with an opportunity to continue their sport centred socialisation over the winter months. This aspect will be examined in the next chapter.

Chapter 5:Football in Westmeath, 1884-1900¹

Introduction

The purpose of this section is to examine the development of the various football codes in the county. The principal focus will be on the development of the GAA in Westmeath concentrating on the period 1884-1894, when the movement was at its strongest in the area. The emphasis in this chapter is on how the GAA worked at local level with a particular focus on the sporting and social dimension of the association, as opposed to the political which has been adequately examined at both the local and national level as illustrated in the introduction. A number of issues will be examined including the introduction, growth and development of the GAA within the county. Club development and decline will be examined by using a number of case studies of both rural and urban clubs, the nature of the game that was played and how it changed over the period of study will be examined and a socio-occupational profile will be constructed of a sample of those who played and managed the game.

The development of soccer within the county will be examined and it will be shown that the decline of football in Athlone provided a major boost to soccer within the town, as a core group of young middle-class commercial men became involved in the game and this provided the stability and continuity that enabled soccer to develop. The limited development of rugby will also be analysed. This chapter was based on an in-depth analysis of football activity covered in the local newspapers. This enabled a quantitative analysis to be made of the early football playing activity in county Westmeath in all codes. Unfortunately this type of evaluation hasn't been undertaken for other counties and therefore any meaningful comparisons with other areas are impossible.

Gaelic Athletic Association

The Gaelic Athletic Association was established on 1 November 1884 at a meeting held in Hayes's hotel in Thurles, county Tipperary. Michael Cusack provided the motivating energy for the establishment of the new organisation and according to de

¹ In this chapter, the commonly used Irish terminology will be used to describe these games, Gaelic football will be referred to as football; association football will be referred to as soccer and rugby football will be simply referred to as rugby.

Burca ‘without him there would have been no GAA, certainly not in the 1880s’.² A multi-faceted sporting and professional career had convinced Cusack of the necessity to re-organise Irish athletics on a democratic basis controlled by a national organisation and of revising the game of hurling.³ Cusack’s main support for the establishment of the new organisation came from a Carrick-on-Suir, county Tipperary businessman and farmer, Maurice Davin. Davin brought social prestige and the status of a star athlete to the new movement. A member of one of Ireland’s great athletic families, three Davin brothers had between 1873 and 1882, won twenty-six Irish athletic titles, organised by the Irish Champion Athletic Club, the organisation despised by Cusack.⁴ Davin competed successfully in rowing, at boxing and especially at the weight events in athletics.⁵ His greatest athletic moment happened in 1881 when he emerged from retirement and won both the shot and hammer titles at the AAA championships. His brother Pat, at the same championships, won the long jump and high jump titles, setting championship records in the process.⁶ Davin’s background was thus in the world of organised athletics, where rules and regulations mattered and the codification system developed in Britain held sway. Unlike Cusack, he felt that abuses such as gambling and cheating weren’t a problem for Irish athletics but was concerned at the decline of the traditional Irish events of weight throwing and jumping and of the need for games ‘especially for the humble and the hard-working who seem now to be born into no other inheritance than an everlasting round of labour’.⁷ As might be expected from someone of his background in codified athletics, he wished to see proper rules drawn up for both football and hurling declaring ‘I would not like to see either game now as the rules stand at present’.⁸

Despite the best intentions of both Cusack and Davin much of the initial history of the GAA involved a tri-partite struggle for control of the association’s executive waged between the constitutional nationalists, the Catholic Church and the revolutionary secret society, the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB). The national convention of the GAA of January 1889 saw the culmination of this two year struggle for control

² de Burca, *The G.A.A.*, 9.

³ Ibid, 17.

⁴ Seamus O’ Riain, *Maurice Davin (1842-1927), first president of the GAA*, Dublin, nd, 26.

⁵ O’ Riain, *Davin*, 17-19.

⁶ Lovesey, *Amateur Athletic Association*, 36.

⁷ Mandle, *Gaelic Athletic Association*, 5.

⁸ Ibid. 4.

conclude with the IRB finally gaining control of the national executive of the association. De Burca interprets this as a reflection of the dominance of the IRB at the grass roots level of the organisation.⁹ The reality was that the IRB had managed to place its personnel in the key county administrative positions.

Westmeath GAA chronology

Following the IRB takeover, the association was subjected to immediate clerical condemnation. In Westmeath, Bishop Nulty of Meath (a diocese that included most of county Westmeath) and his priests launched an attack on the GAA in all chapels on 21 July 1889. The clerics outlined three problems created by participation in GAA activities. Young men who travelled outside their own parishes to play matches against other clubs were led to drunkenness, they were introduced to secret societies and the priests claimed to have evidence that the Government was paying leading members of the GAA to draw the members into secret work. Nulty himself chose to speak in Navan, the county town of Meath, where he prohibited the playing of matches outside of a parish due to the increase in drunkenness and secret society activity.¹⁰ The choice of Navan rather than the cathedral town of Mullingar by the leading cleric to deliver his homily is significant. The message from the pulpit was intended for the parishioners of Meath rather than Westmeath where GAA activity was insignificant. At the time of the clerical condemnation only three football games between Westmeath teams were reported. Based on the evidence contained in police reports, Nulty and his clerics had very little cause for worry about secret society activity, as the IRB was weak in Westmeath. The most significant GAA related IRB activity reported was at a football match held at Killucan in March 1890 where the presence of a 'good many local IRB men' was recorded; at Moate twice in the same month, the police had to report that nothing of importance was observed; in Mullingar, in April thirteen IRB men were reported to have attended a match.¹¹ A similar report was made from Athlone in May, whilst in Killucan only four IRB men were reported present in a crowd of over 400 people.¹²

⁹ de Burca, GAA, 49.

¹⁰ NA, CBS, DICS, Midland Division, 1887-94, S21/1035.

¹¹ NA, CBS, S21/159.

¹² NA, CBS, S21/665.

Centrally located Athlone, with its nodality enhanced by rail and river connections, was chosen as a venue for some of the early tournament games that were important in the promotion of the early GAA organised sport. A multi-dimensional tournament was held there on Easter Monday 1886 in which the feature event was a hurling match between Clara and Athenry.¹³ The new association was first brought to the attention of Mullingar readers of the *Westmeath Examiner* in January 1885.¹⁴ The following week 'A lover of sport' played the nationalist card when he enquired if it was possible that the young men of Mullingar had 'not that amount of National Spirit which would induce them to preserve these games which are far and away superior to those brought to us by our English friends'. A pessimistic response from local athlete W. D. Cleary, who was active in athletics, pointed out that 'Westmeath was uncivilized in athletics'. He asked where

is our ancient wrestling arena, our hurling clubs, our dashing footballers, our unconquerable handball players, our weight throwers, and hammer slingers? They are gone, and I must say forever.

In researching this thesis no evidence emerged to suggest that they had ever existed. Despite the disorganised state of sport, Cleary was cautious about committing to the new association. He urged people to wait until 'after the meeting of the Irish athletics on 21st February'.¹⁵ This was the meeting that established an alternative athletic association to the GAA, the Irish Amateur Athletic Association at the Wicklow Hotel, Dublin.¹⁶ Inspired perhaps by the newspaper correspondence, some of the members of the National Workingmen's Club adjourned to Ward's field in Ballinderry (Mullingar) on 22 February 1885 and organised a 100 yards handicap race. On St. Patrick's Day a more ambitious programme was organised for the same venue.

The progress of the GAA in Westmeath followed a different pattern to the national one and to that experienced in other midland counties. In general terms, antagonism on the part of many bishops and priests, together with the friction between the Parnellites and anti-Parnellites, seriously weakened the GAA nationally for upwards

¹³ *WI*, 1 May 1886.

¹⁴ *WE*, 31 Jan. 1885.

¹⁵ *WE*, 14 Feb. 1885.

¹⁶ Griffin, *Irish Athletics*, 37-9.

of a decade.¹⁷ The Westmeath pattern of development avoided some of this fallout. It developed later and survived the damage that was inflicted on other areas by the IRB takeover and the fallout from the Parnell divorce case and resulting parliamentary party divisions. Police reports provide quantitative evidence of the decline and fall of the GAA in the midland counties. In December 1892, the RIC reported the existence of only nine clubs in Kildare a decline from nineteen in December 1891 and thirty-eight in December 1890.¹⁸ In Cavan, where the influence of the IRB was particularly strong, thirty-nine clubs existed at the end of 1891 but by the end of 1892 none existed.¹⁹ A similar pattern existed in the other counties featuring in the midland crime branch special reports and is illustrated in Appendix 9. In contrast, the peak years of football activity in Westmeath, extended through 1892 when thirty-six football games were reported in the local newspapers and 1893 when forty-nine were played.²⁰

The earliest and most active football clubs were located in the eastern third of the county. This was a district that was familiar with a variety of sporting disciplines and contained individuals experienced in the organisation of sports events. There is also evidence that there was some tradition of folk football in the area. This version of football was primarily a game for large numbers played over large distances and involved the majority of the male population.²¹ According to evidence collected by the folklore commissioners, games between teams of over 100 a side took place annually in Killucan ‘without rules or referee and generally ended in a wrestling match’.²² A branch of the new organisation may have been formed at Killucan in the early summer of 1885 although contemporary newspapers make no mention of the club’s existence.²³ Football was played regularly on an organised basis in Kinnegad from December 1887 where the members of the Kinnegad Slashers club assembled each Sunday and played a match between two teams called the Liberals and the Tories. In May 1890, the club was able to boast of having played twelve matches in

¹⁷ Comerford, *Inventing the nation: Ireland*, London, 2003, 223.

¹⁸ NAI, CBS, S/2452.

¹⁹ NA, CBS, S/6216

²⁰ Based on an analysis of the local papers the *Westmeath Examiner*, the *Westmeath Nationalist*, the *Westmeath Independent* and the *Westmeath Guardian*.

²¹ Tony Collins, *Rugby’s great split: class, culture and the origins of rugby league football*, London, 1998, 1.

²² WCL, Evidence collected by folklore commissioners, parish of Killucan, 340-1.

²³ *GAA Golden jubilee supplement*, Dublin, 1934, 80.

which they won nine, lost two and played one draw, scoring in the process 7 goals and 43 points and conceding only eight points. There is evidence of two other clubs existing in Westmeath in 1888. In August, the Delvin Emmetts club were reported to have organised a tournament for the following month. In September, the Clonmellon Saint Patrick's club were said to be organising a similar event. There is no confirmatory newspaper evidence that either of these tournaments took place. Two matches were also played between the Delvin and Kinnegad clubs.²⁴ Members of the Thomastown Rangers club began to hold regular practice sessions from February 1889.²⁵ Five years after the foundation of the parent body football began to make progress in the two main urban centres in the county. In Mullingar, the first branch of the GAA was formed on Thursday, 17 October 1889 when a football club was founded at a meeting held in O'Sullivan's, Greville Street. The organisers of the meeting were Roland W. Moorwood and W. D. Cleary 'who canvassed the town and produced sinews of war'. This was the same Cleary who had urged caution four years previously and who had in 1888 tried to recruit members for a Gaelic Football Club, which proved ineffective (Figure 17).

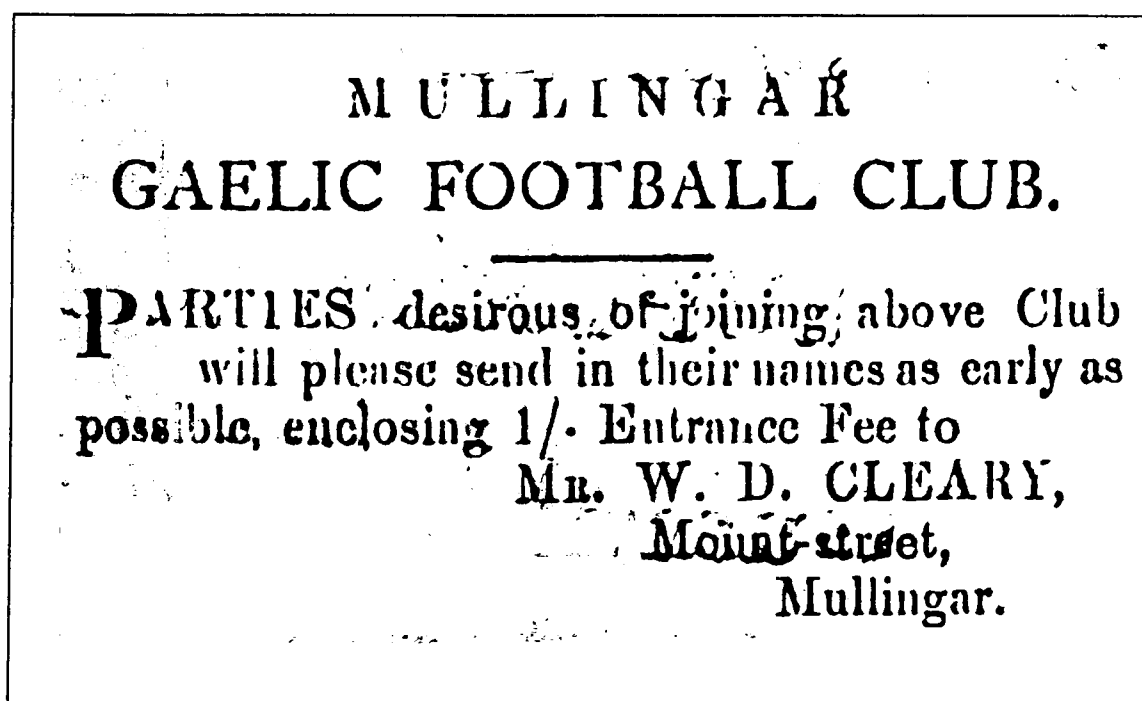


Figure 17: Advertisement placed by W.D. Cleary in *Westmeath Examiner*, October 1888.

²⁴ *WE*, 15 Dec. 1887, 25 April, 29 Sept., 6 Oct., 12 Nov., 17 Nov., 24 Nov., 1 Dec., 1888,

²⁵ *WE*, 2 Feb. 1889.

The thirty who attended the meeting agreed to establish a branch of the GAA in the town and the following Sunday the first reported football match in Mullingar was played at Ballyglass between teams selected by Moorwood and Cleary.²⁶ The *Westmeath Independent* reported on the formation of an Athlone GAA club in early January 1890. A membership of forty was reported that ‘included some of the best athletes of the town and neighbourhood’. Officers were elected and an appeal was launched to the general public for subscriptions to purchase a set of jerseys.²⁷ Also in January, a new club was reported from Moate, the William O’Brien club. A membership of forty was claimed for this club, which held regular Sunday practice matches, in a field provided by T. Kelly.²⁸ The Moate club was disadvantaged by the position of antagonism adopted by Canon Kearney and other clerics in the locality. In June, Kearney preached against ‘the disgusting sins of intemperance’ and warned his parishioners about taking part in football matches on Sundays.²⁹ Given the level of clerical opposition, inevitably, a second club, the Moate Shamrocks, with total abstinence from alcohol as its basic principle, was established in the town.³⁰ This growth of new GAA clubs is illustrated in Table 26.³¹

Club	Date of formation
Thomastown Rangers	February 1889
Mullingar Commercial	October 1889
Athlone T.P. O'Connor's	January 1890
Moate William O'Briens	January 1890
Mullingar Shamrocks	January 1890
Ballinahown BC Molloy's	February 1890
Raharney Rovers	March 1890
Moate Shamrocks	November 1890
Cullion Celtics	November 1890

Table 26: Formation of the main GAA clubs in Westmeath, 1889-90.

As 1890 concluded, football was played in Mullingar, Wooddown, Athlone, Moate, Ballinahown, Killucan, Raharney, Rathowen, and Kilbeggan. In January 1893 Rochfortbridge Erin’s Hopes were founded while in March, Gaulstown Park, Lovers

²⁶ *WE*, 26 Oct. 1889.
²⁷ *WI*, 4 Jan.1890.
²⁸ *WI*, 11 Jan. 1890.
²⁹ *WI*, 21 June 1890.
³⁰ *WI*, 22 Nov. 1890.
³¹ *WG*, 4 Feb. 1890; *WI*, 29 March 1890; *WE*, 8 March 1890, 22 Nov. 1890.

of Erin were reported to have affiliated to the county committee.³² By 1894 young men in Ballynacargy, Ballinalack and Walshestown had experienced the novelty of taking part in a football game. The geographic location of the main football playing districts is illustrated in Figure 18. Appendix 10 documents the number of games played by these clubs in the 1890s.

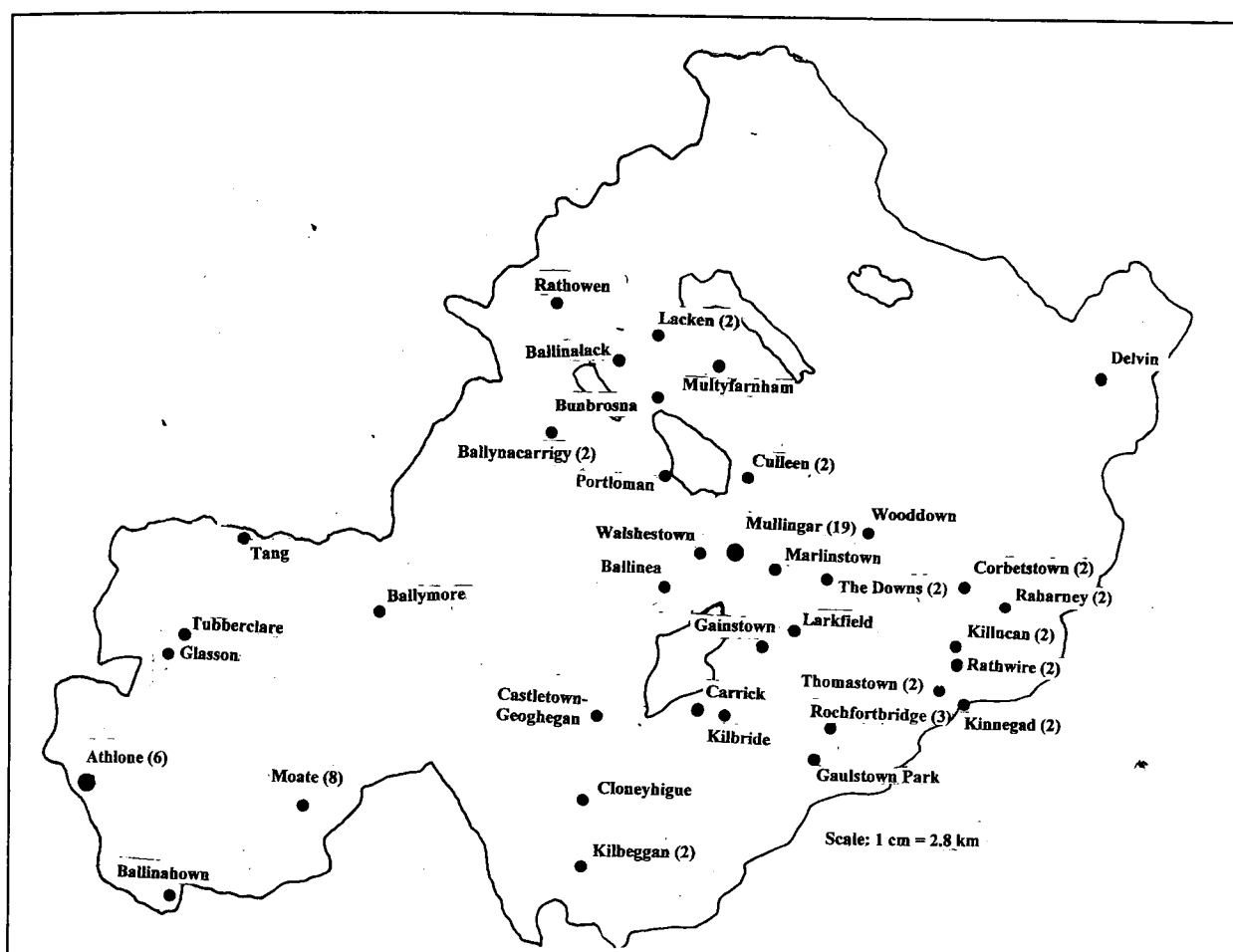


Figure 18: Location of main football playing districts in Westmeath in the 1890s.

County Committee

The GAA was unique of the early Irish sporting bodies in that it organised competitive games on a county basis with county committees established to organise county championship competitions and promote the playing of the games. As clubs became more numerous moves were initiated within the county to organise a county committee to provide a management structure. This was not an IRB manipulated intervention or a development imposed from outside the county but originated within the clubs themselves and in particular amongst the members of the Mullingar

³² *WN*, 2 Feb. 1893, 6 March 1893.

Commercials Club. In November 1890, the committee of the club placed advertisements in the three Westmeath newspapers calling on all clubs to 'communicate with the Hon. Sec. Commercial Gaelic Club, Mullingar when a day will be named to meet the convenience of all clubs as far as possible', for the purpose of organising a county committee.³³ Two weeks later the *Westmeath Examiner* in an editorial supported the objectives of the Commercial club commenting that 'the want of a county council has perhaps a great deal to do with the present disorganised state of the county'.³⁴ A county committee was eventually formed three months later, at a meeting held in the Lecture Hall, Mullingar on 25 March 1891. Fr. E O'Reilly was elected first president of the committee, Martin McGreevey vice-president, James Bennett (Kinnegad Slashers) treasurer, and James Murray (Mullingar Shamrocks) secretary. Nine months after the pulpit condemnation Fr. O' Reilly now provided respectability to the county committee. There is no record of this committee holding meetings or engaging in any promotional activities. O' Reilly's willingness to allow his name to be used for the prestige and promotional purposes to the new body meant that Church opposition to GAA was ended in Westmeath. O' Reilly's involvement in the GAA seems to have been brief as there is no report of the committee ever meeting, but the GAA in Westmeath enjoyed at a minimum tacit Church support, as is clear from the social activities of many of the key personnel. Fr. O' Reilly's appointment as President of the Committee despite the earlier opposition to the association can only be understood in the context of clerical opposition to Parnell. In December 1890 Bishop Nulty ordered his priests to actively campaign against Parnell. Clerical opposition to Parnell was based on moral and political grounds as Parnell was 'stamped with the double [sic] crime, that of treachery, injustice and adultery?'³⁵

In November 1891, a new committee met at Michael Doherty's premises Earl Street, Mullingar. Martin McGreevey chaired the meeting with Bennett and Murray also present. Committee members present included J. Flynn (Kinnegad Slashers), James Mulvey (Mullingar FC), J. Coleman (Thomastown Rangers), A. Fitzsimons (Raharney Rovers) and Patrick Connell (Cullion Celtics). The meeting passed a number of important resolutions aimed at managing the association in the county.

³³ *WE*, 8 Nov. 1890.

³⁴ *WE*, 22 Nov. 1890.

³⁵ Murray, 'Nationality and local politics', 151.

Playing with more than one club would result in suspension. In an attempt to force clubs to affiliate and exert control over the playing of games, a resolution was passed imposing suspension on 'an affiliated team kicking against a non-affiliated team'. Most importantly, the committee decided to organise a county championship. Clubs were required to have affiliated by 1 January 1892. The affiliation fee was set at ten shillings and clubs wishing to enter the county championship were required to pay and extra 2s. 6d.³⁶ In an attempt to manage the post-game situation and reduce expenses for competing teams, President McGreevey prohibited receptions for championship matches in February 1893.³⁷

The composition of the county committee was limited geographically to officers from the eastern half of the county with no representative from Athlone present where there had been considerable football activity in 1890. By the time of the next meeting, held on 21 February 1892, nine clubs had affiliated.³⁸ Five of these teams were included in the championship draw made at the meeting. The desire of the Athlone members to become part of the Westmeath GAA community was essentially rejected at the meeting as the club was refused entry to the championship on the basis that their entry fee postal order did not arrive in time. The championship provided a competitive alternative to the series of friendly games organised by the clubs and proved to be extremely attractive to spectators.

Early championships

The 1892 championship was a tame affair passing without major incident; however the 1893 version was a tempestuous one, and the resulting fall out destroyed the organisational structure of the Westmeath GAA. The championship progressed smoothly to the semi-final stage but all this was to change with the meeting of the two Mullingar teams. The contemporary newspapers placed the blame squarely on the Shamrock players or rather a 'couple' of their players, for as the *Nationalist* reported, 'the larger number of the members of the team were actually disgusted at the conduct

³⁶ *WN*, 3 Dec. 1891.

³⁷ *WN*, 10 Feb. 1893.

³⁸ *WN*, 2 March. 1892. The affiliated clubs were Mullingar Football Club, Mullingar Shamrocks, Kinnegad Slashers, Thomastown Rangers, Cullion Celtics, Raharney Rovers, Wooddown Rackers, Corbetstown Home Rulers and the Athlone T.P.O'Connor Club.

of a few'.³⁹ Violence and a controversial winning score that was followed by an assault on the referee characterised the game. The Mullingar captain, James Mulvey, was assaulted in the first half and fighting continued throughout the second half, almost without interruption. The most serious incident happened when Shamrocks scored a point after the referee had blown for a free and when he refused to allow the score 'the captain of the Shamrocks deliberately struck the referee with his clenched hand in the mouth.'⁴⁰ The losing Mullingar Shamrocks team objected to the result and appealed against the decision of the referee to award the game to the Mullingar Football Club. In the course of the unsuccessful hearing, the county committee chairman, Martin McGreevey, was assaulted by the captain of the Shamrocks team.⁴¹ Having lost their appeal, the Shamrocks representatives informed the board members that they would be present and prepared to play on final day. This incident is important as it illustrates at least one example of how internal football matters destroyed the local organisation. Two of the leading clubs were lost to the game following the incidents associated with the competition, as well as one of the leading personalities associated with the organisational structure.

The 1893 championship is significant in that it is the only occasion on which a Westmeath championship semi-final and final were played on the same day, 23 April 1893. This decision was the cause of more dissension, especially for the Athlone club, and led to the exchange of viewpoints through the columns of the weekly national journal *Sport*. The controversy surrounding the semi-final and the possibility of trouble developing at the final made it difficult to obtain a venue for the games, 'those gentlemen who heretofore were so generous having to express their regret that their land was laid down for meadow', but eventually John O'Connell obliged a deputation from the Mullingar FC and placed a field at Robinstown Levinge at the disposal of the county committee.⁴²

The members of the Shamrocks club provided the stewards for the 1892 final to prevent the spectators from encroaching on to the pitch; a year later the forces of the RIC under the command of chief constable Reddington were present to prevent the

³⁹ *WN*, 13 April 1893.

⁴⁰ *WN*, 13 April 1893.

⁴¹ *WN*, 20 April 1893.

⁴² *WG*, 5 May 1893.

members of the Shamrocks club from invading the pitch. In the semi-final, Athlone T. P. O' Connors beat the Wooddown Rackers 0-3 to 0-1 and after an interval of one hour lined out in the final against Mullingar FC. True to their word the Shamrocks players also prepared to take the field but were prevented from doing so by the RIC.⁴³ This cooperation between the RIC and the GAA is atypical and supports the contention that the GAA as it initially developed in Westmeath was in its essence a sporting movement devoid of a political agenda. T.P. O'Connor's completed their double victory on a 2-3 to 1-6 score-line but one of the Athlone goals was bitterly disputed by the Mullingar side. Subsequent appeals to the county committee and to the Central Council failed to reverse the decision of the referee, Martin McGreevey, to award the game to the T.P.O'Connor's. Central Council did however decide to investigate the claim that the Athlone club had played under association rules after affiliation.⁴⁴

Internal tensions associated with the breakdown of relationships between the Mullingar clubs and the fallout between the Mullingar FC and the Athlone club destroyed the infrastructure of the Westmeath GAA and it was almost a decade later before a new and effective county committee was established. Martin McGreevey was unfortunate to have been the referee in the disputed final, as well as being Mullingar FC and county president. He severed his connections with the GAA in the county and continued his administrative career with organisations such as the Mullingar National Workingmen's Club and the Holy Faith Confraternity. Mullingar Shamrocks played only one more match following the events of 1892, and there is no record of the T.P. O' Connor's club again taking part in Gaelic football matches and as will be shown later in this chapter many of the playing members of the club were to become key members of the Athlone soccer clubs.⁴⁵

Playing practices

The use of police reports as the main source of information on the early history of the GAA produces a profile that emphasises heavy IRB involvement. It also underestimates the amount of football that was played in an area. The police reports

⁴³ *WN*, 27 April 1893.

⁴⁴ *WN*, 27 July 1893.

⁴⁵ *WN*, 15 Feb. 1894.

for Westmeath only identify nine active clubs in 1890.⁴⁶ Newspaper analysis provides evidence for many more football combinations. Between 1886 and 1900 seventy-three different groupings are recorded in the newspapers as having played a football match in Westmeath. The word groupings is deliberately chosen as in many of the games formally constituted clubs were not involved but instead *ad hoc* arrangements are likely to have been made by groups of people living in an area to challenge their peers in a neighbouring district to a football game. Of the different combinations recorded, nine of these represented the second or reserve teams of established clubs. Of these Kinnegad Slashers on eight occasions, Mullingar FC on five, Mullingar Shamrocks on seven occasions and Thomastown Rangers on fourteen occasions had sufficient players interested in the game to field reserve teams. The number of games played between 1888 and 1899 is illustrated in Figure 19.

This hierarchical development of football clubs was a normal one that was common to other football codes, and in societies very different to Westmeath society. This was the pattern discovered by Metcalf in his study of soccer in the mining communities of East Northumberland.⁴⁷ Tranter, in his examination of football in central Scotland, discovered that at all levels soccer clubs came and went ‘with the regularity of a yo-yo’.⁴⁸ On one level there was a mass of ephemeral unaffiliated teams and there was a small number of semi-permanent formally constituted clubs. The latter were integrated into the practices of modern sport; the members of the former group still displayed many of the characteristics of pre-modern sport as defined by Adelman.⁴⁹ Their contests were arranged by individuals directly or indirectly involved in the teams; the rules were likely to vary from one game to the next and from one locale to another; the competition between the teams was meaningful locally only and public information on the contests was likely to have been limited, local and oral.

Four distinct categories of football games were organised. Intra-club games were the most common where the members assembled each Sunday and selected sides to

⁴⁶ NA, Crime Branch Special: GAA reports from SW and Midlands Division on clubs etc at the end of the year, 1890, 2452/S.

⁴⁷ Alan Metcalf, ‘Football in the mining communities of east Northumberland, 1882-1914’ in *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 5 (3), 1988, 269-91.

⁴⁸ Tranter, ‘Chronology’, 188-203.

⁴⁹ Melvin L. Adelman, *A sporting time: New York City and the rise of modern athletics, 1820-70*, Urbana and Chicago, 1990, 6.

compete against each other. These sides took various forms. In Kinnegad, throughout 1899, teams of members calling themselves the Tories and the Liberals played on a regular basis, matches between the married and single members occasionally interrupted the monotony of these games. In Athlone, the members of the T.P.O'Connor's club arranged games between the grocers' assistants and the rest, or between the natives and the outsiders. In Mullingar, the clubs tended to favour games played between selections made by the captain and the vice-captain. These games helped to train players in the basic skills and rules of the game and helped to maintain interest in the sport in the intervals between properly organised inter-club games. Despite being played between members of the same club these games often developed a sharp competitive edge that sometimes became violent confrontations as suggested by the comments of the *Westmeath Nationalist* reporter following one of these practices between the members of Mullingar FC. He suggested that 'if teams kick as they did last Sunday they had better bring an ambulance wagon with them'.⁵⁰

Challenge games were organised normally between neighbouring clubs. Initiated by contact between club officers or club captains, or occasionally by means of challenges issued through the local press, these were the most common type of event organised. Of the 250 inter-club games played in the county or involving Westmeath clubs 94 per cent of the games were of the friendly or tournament variety.⁵¹ The setting up of one game usually resulted in a second game as it was common for the participants to engage in a return match, provided of course the first game was free of serious incident. Stronger, financially viable and more middle-class clubs were also invited to travel outside the county to participate in the tournaments organised by some of the established clubs. Mullingar Football Club, for example, made its competitive debut in September 1891 by travelling to Ballinasloe to participate in a tournament organised by the local club and also travelled occasionally to Dublin to play matches, as did their occupational counterparts in Athlone.

Finally, the establishment of a county committee in 1891 provided a short-term alternative to the ad hoc games arrangement. Clubs within the county were provided with a formalised competitive outlet but, unfortunately, this organisation did not

⁵⁰ *WN*, 24 Nov. 1892.

⁵¹ These games were played in the period between 1888-99.

survive beyond the early months of 1894. Three county championships were organised by this committee attracting an entry of five clubs in 1892, eight in 1893 but only two clubs affiliated in 1894.

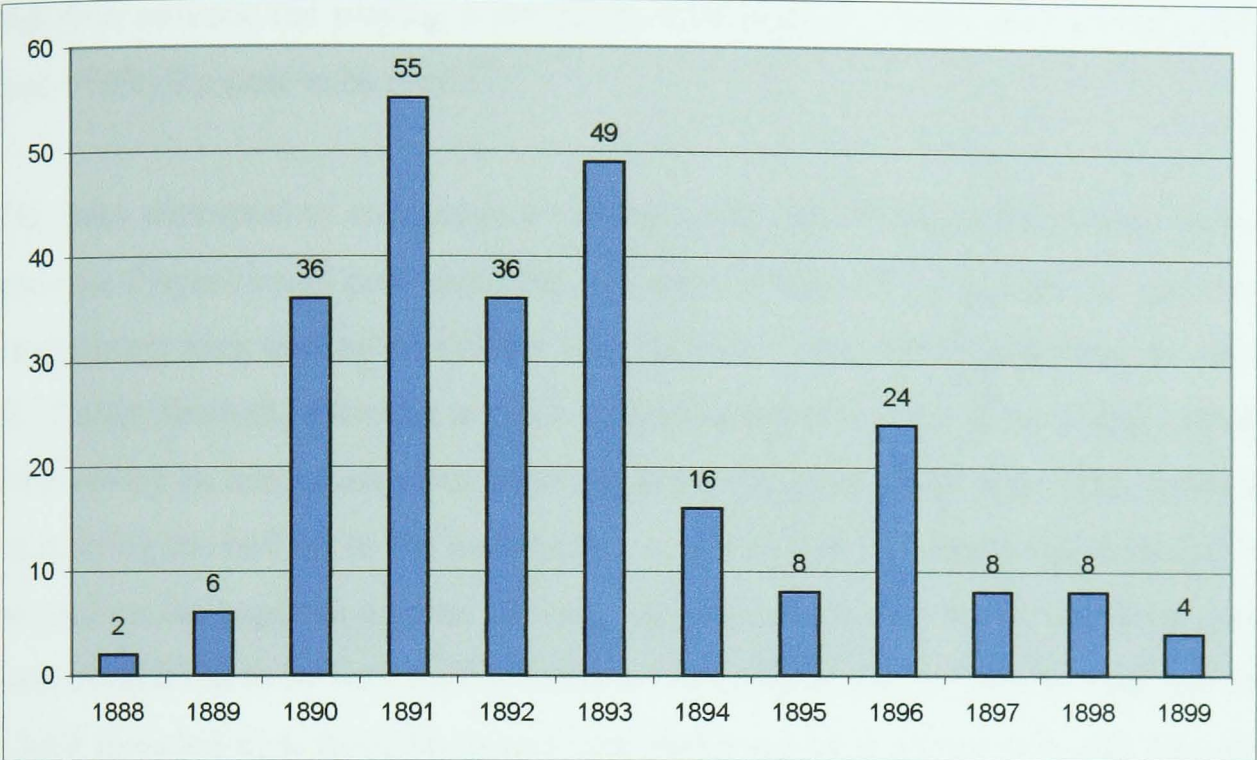


Figure 19: Number of inter-club football games played in Westmeath 1888-1899.

The nature of the game

Football was essentially a compromise game, combining elements of traditional folk football games with soccer, rugby and Australian rules, motivated by the desire to formulate a distinctive football code.⁵² Maurice Davin was probably responsible for the codification of the earliest rules. Davin’s biographer, O’Riain has documented the intensive study of the rules of field sports made by Davin over the years as indicated by the numerous entries made in his notebooks and his accumulation of cuttings from newspapers and magazines on the emerging rules of rugby and association football.⁵³ The game initially played regularly in Westmeath was in theory subject to the playing rules adopted by the association in 1889.⁵⁴ These rules were notably short and imprecise in relation to the playing of the football game. Despite their imprecision,

⁵² Comerford, *Inventing Ireland*, 221; Lennon, *Towards a philosophy for legislation in Gaelic Games*, Gormanstown, county Meath, 2000, 17.
⁵³ O’ Riain, *Davin*, 61.
⁵⁴ Joe Lennon, *The playing rules of football and hurling 1884-1995*, Gormanstown, county Meath, 1997, 32-33.

the rules did contain the essential features of a modern codified football game; the boundaries of the playing area was defined, contending sides were to be equal in number and the method of scoring was defined. Thirteen rules in total were introduced dealing with pitch organisation, the number and duty of match officials and their powers, the playing conventions of the game, methods of scoring and the type of playing gear to be used.⁵⁵

The rules attempted to encourage a kicking game as carrying and throwing were not allowed. Players could only catch the ball when it was off the ground but had then to immediately kick the ball or strike it with the hand. This rule helped shape an identity for Gaelic football, allowing a catch differentiated the game from soccer, catching followed by an immediate release distinguished the game from rugby. The restrictions on carrying the ball led to the introduction of a skill called dodging where the ball was hopped on the hand. In a game between the Shamrocks and Moate the latter players were considered to be very useful 'in the art of dodging the ball on the hand and many a well intended kick from Mullingar was prevented by a Moate man stooping down and pushing the ball out of reach in another direction with his hand'.⁵⁶

The scoring system in use at this time created a game that was attritional in nature. The victorious team was the one scoring the greater number of goals as the value of a goal outweighed any number of points scored. This system, allied to the crowded nature of the playing field, tended to encourage physical battles and defensive play. The basic tactic was to prevent the opposition from scoring a goal and if a goal was scored, then even the most tactically naive teams were aware of the importance of shoring up the defence. Poor quality fields, deep grass, the winter playing season, heavy water absorbing footballs, the crowded arena and footwear designed for everyday purposes combined to ensure that scores were scarce in the game. Thirty-six football games were reported in Westmeath in 1890; forty-one goals in total were scored but twenty-one of these were scored in five games leaving the remaining thirty-one games to produce twenty goals. On twenty-two occasions at least one team involved failed to register a score. In 1891, there was a more even spread of goals

⁵⁵ Lennon, *Rules*, 32.

⁵⁶ *WG*, 4 April. 1890.

with thirty-five scored in the fifty-five games played; the same year twenty-seven teams failed to register a score.

An article in the *Westmeath Nationalist* in September 1891 illustrated some of the essential features of the game and provides a rare insight into how the early football games were played, at this time. The author identified ‘some very regrettable faults’. He believed that most Westmeath teams erred in the proper placing of men in the field and in the strict observance by the men of these positions. Allied to this was the failure of players to carry out the instructions of the captain. In many cases the captain ‘might as well have been bellowing at one of Stanley’s dwarfs in distant Africa’, and ‘away goes Jack after his especial hobby, Tom after his, Jill after his and so on until all is confusion, and the game becomes one of a happy lucky sort’.

The quality of the passing also attracted his attention. The author believed that it was one of the most important elements of success and could not be too much refined. The skill should be cultivated as much as possible with the feet. He wasn’t impressed with the use of the hands for passing as ‘it looks ungainly and is exceedingly dangerous to be continually reaching down and shoving the ball along with the hands’.⁵⁷ The essentials of good passing, and players maintaining their position, frequently came to the attention of contemporary commentators. A commentator in November 1891 wished that the Raharney Rovers ‘would have a little more discipline, keeping their places properly in the field and practicing passing’.⁵⁸ The undisciplined nature of the game is also suggested in the report of the Shamrocks and Wooddown Rackers ‘extra-ordinary’ game, played in January 1892. It was ‘really more of a hurry, scurry, rough and tumble game than anything else’. The lack of scientific play was regretted.⁵⁹ Despite the haphazard nature of the game, few matches in Westmeath remained unfinished. Unfortunately, with no comparable information from other areas it is impossible to evaluate the typicality of the county. As can be seen below, problems developed when teams travelled outside their own districts to play in areas where a different code of rules might have existed. Problems might also develop when a referee unfamiliar with local practices took charge of a game, as

⁵⁷ *WN*, 17 Sept. 1891.

⁵⁸ *WN*, 5 Nov. 1891.

⁵⁹ *WN*, 4 Feb. 1892.

happened when Cullion Celtics played the second team of Mullingar FC. The former disagreed with the interpretations of the Ballinasloe referee and walked off the pitch.⁶⁰

Such was the vague nature of the early rules that confusion was inevitable when games were organised. The 1891 championship match between Mullingar and Kinnegad Slashers for instance was ‘played strictly in accordance to the Gaelic rules’ with one exception when in the second half one ‘of the Kinnegad team, who is stated to have formerly belonged to the “Clonards” hugged the ball under his arm and in right true rugby style ran towards the Mullingar goal’.⁶¹ The following Sunday in Mullingar, Wooddown Rackers proved far too strong for the Rochfortbridge Erin’s Hopes winning by 1-11 to 0-0 in a game that was ‘impetuous fast and strong, but unscientific, rash and wanting in cultivation’.⁶² A core set of rules may have been generally known and taken for granted with the detailed rules for a game agreed on the day between the rival captains. Players were required to adapt quickly to any variations agreed by their captain, agreements which could be easily forgotten in the excitement of a keenly contested game. The February 1893 county council meeting featured a discussion on rules and the President, Martin McGreevey, endeavoured to explain various rules to the delegates. He informed them that the old rules had been revised, but the officers had never got a copy of them. It seems from the meeting that the journal *Sport* was the main vehicle for imparting information on rule changes.⁶³

Problems with rule interpretation increased in scale when teams travelled outside the county for games. In July 1892, the Mullingar Football Club travelled to Clonturk Park in Dublin to compete in a festival of hurling and football. Following their match with Fontenoys the members of the club passed a motion of condemnation ‘at the transgression of the Gaelic rules’ by the Dublin team and addressed their concerns in a letter to the editor of the *Freeman’s Journal* and the national sports newspaper *Sport*. The principal objections were that the Fontenoys played in a style that was closer to rugby than the Gaelic game and used tactics that included lying on the ball on the ground, head-butting from behind and holding the ball rather than releasing it

⁶⁰ WN, 26 Nov. 1891.

⁶¹ WN, 16 March 1893.

⁶² WN, 23 March 1893.

⁶³ WN, 9 Feb. 1893.

as the rules required.⁶⁴ Similarly when the club travelled to Dublin to play the Dunleary Independent club they found the Adelaide road ‘rather small for a Gaelic match’, whilst the second half of the match was ‘simply indescribable as the Dunleary men began to play under rugby rules and they pulled down the visitors whether playing the ball with the hands or the feet’.⁶⁵ As will be shown later the T.P. O’Connor club from Athlone faced similar problems when it travelled outside the county. The evidence suggests that different versions of football were played which varied on a regional basis and teams prior to matches agreed on a compromise set of rules to be used for a specific game.

The early version of football played in Westmeath was confined to the winter-spring period, with the majority of games taking place between November and May. An analysis of football matches played during the most active phase of the activity in Westmeath between 1890-93 is illustrated in Figure 20. Of the 176 matches reported, 31.50 per cent were played during the months of November, December and January; 50.00 percent between February and April. This preference for a time of the year when weather conditions were likely to be least favourable had a practical and theoretical basis. In a county where public recreational space was unavailable, football clubs were dependent on the patronage of a co-operative farmer for the use of a suitable field. These were the months when grass growth was dormant, so meadows weren’t damaged by the action of over forty footballers confined to a relatively small area, nor did the spectators that crowded to some of the venues damage them.

There was also a belief that the summer months were climatically unsuitable for football and interfered with the promotion of athletics. This opinion was articulated at the Kerry GAA convention in January 1893 when attention was drawn to the increased popularity of summer football. Delegates complained that the activity ‘injuriously affects athletic sports and prevents numerous promising athletes from devoting their full attention to training’. ‘Hot boiling summer days are not conducive to the pleasure of vigorous pastimes, the continuous playing of which is certain to cause an enormous amount of *ennui*’.⁶⁶ An editorial in *Sport*, in March, supported the

⁶⁴ *FJ*, 19, 21 July, 1892. *Sport*, 23 July 1892.

⁶⁵ *WE*, 10 March, 1893.

⁶⁶ *Sport*, 28 Jan. 1893.

idea. The editor believed that nothing was more ‘likely to invite apathy and dislike for vigorous pastimes into the mind of a player than an hour’s heavy play under the auspices of a scorching sun’. The player who rested for the summer will return with ‘fresh energy and enthusiasm’.⁶⁷ Some Westmeath people shared this opinion. ‘Sportsman’ in his *Westmeath Nationalist* column considered football out of place in the ‘very hot weather we have had recently’ and proposed cricket ‘ever so much a nobler game than the favourite lawn tennis’ as the ideal summer game.⁶⁸ In June 1893, Ballinahown and Cloghan played a game ‘with the thermometer at ninety degrees’. In the reporter’s consideration, football in ‘such conditions is far more toil than pleasure’ making it ‘very difficult if not morally impossible to maintain anything like regular play’.⁶⁹

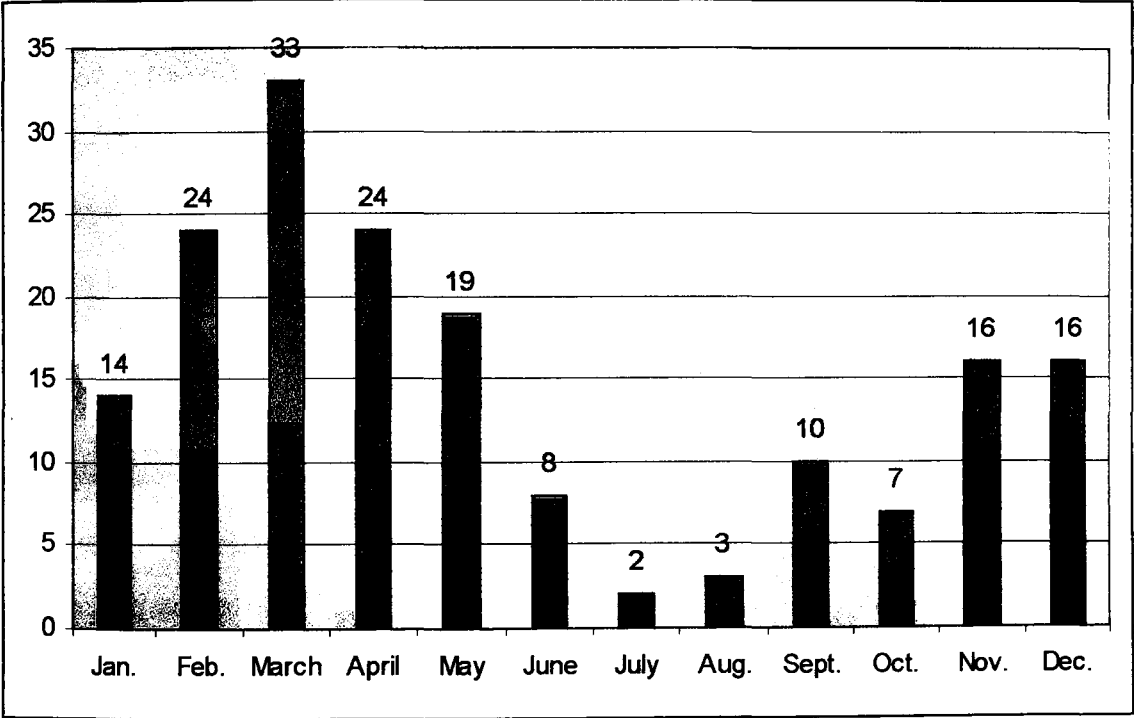


Figure 20: Number of football matches played in Westmeath 1890-93 on a monthly basis.

Football was seasonally confined also in Westmeath because many of its practitioners enjoyed cricket and as seen in Chapter 3 some found recreational fulfilment in summer by cycling. Many young men played football because it presented them with an opportunity of extending their sporting and social activities over the winter months. Summer was the season for cricket playing. Mullingar FC was the winter version of the Mullingar Commercial Cricket Club. The Shamrocks Football Club

⁶⁷*Sport*, 4 March 1893.

⁶⁸*WN*, 14 April 1892.

⁶⁹*WN*, 15 June 1893.

was the winter extension of the Shamrocks Cricket Club. The club was first reported active on the cricket grounds in 1887 and it was involved in at least five matches each in 1888 and 1889. The interchange between the two games is clearly seen in the aftermath of the 1892 county football championship final. Having won the title, the members of the club announced that they would not be playing any more matches until the next season.⁷⁰ Instead they assembled at Michael Doherty's premises on 20 May 1892 'with the object of taking steps for the formation of a representative Mullingar cricket club'.⁷¹ Representative in this context referred to the two main football clubs, as the cricket eleven included members of the Shamrocks club. Of the nineteen listed as having attended the meeting, nine had played in the football final. One of the outstanding football players, Charles Williams, was elected captain of the club. The desire for a representative team was confirmed when the Shamrocks football player and ubiquitous cricketer Percy Muldowney was elected vice-captain. James Mulvey, 'a man foremost in the promotion of every sport organised in town' and captain of Mullingar FC was elected president of the new cricket club. The new club catered for those who were comfortable financially, as the entrance fee was set at 1s., although allowance was made for the less-wealthy with the introduction of a weekly contribution of 2d. However players were responsible for their own travel expenses to matches. The Independent Wanderers also held a special meeting in May 1892 and decided to change the club to a cricket one for the summer.⁷² A similar pattern existed in the Killucan district in the interchange between summer cricket and winter football in the 1890s. Hugh Fulham who was captain of Raharney Rovers in the 1894 football final was a familiar figure on the cricket circuit also.

Gaelic football was played on Sundays, a decision considered by Neal Garnham to be crucially important in popularising the sport as 'it ensured that rural workers and urban white-collar workers such as shop assistants, who could not be assured of a day of rest on Saturdays, were able to participate'.⁷³ The notion of playing games on a Sunday however did not originate with the GAA, as Sunday had been well established

⁷⁰ *WN*, 12 May 1892.

⁷¹ *WN*, 26 May 1892.

⁷² *WN*, 2 June 1892.

⁷³ Neal Garnham, 'Introduction' in *The origins and development of football in Ireland being a reprint of R.M. Peter's Irish Football Annual of 1880*, Belfast, 1999, 11.

as a cricket-playing day in Westmeath by the mid-1880s as the game increased in popularity.

Social Activities

The enjoyment of kicking a heavy football around a makeshift football-field wasn't the only attraction provided by the early clubs. A common theme throughout this study has been the extent to which sports clubs 'provided for sociable activities as an intrinsic part of their growth' and the extent to which what Lowerson has termed 'clubability' formed a core value of the institution.⁷⁴ The social activities organised around the football match were an important part of the culture of the stable GAA club. Travelling to and from the games provided some of the entertainment. In January 1892, Mullingar FC travelled out to Kinnegad to play the locals using 'two brakes, six cars and two traps'. On the outward journey 'music and songs whiled away the time in enjoyable style'.⁷⁵ The well organised clubs in Mullingar, Killucan and Athlone travelled by rail to compete in tournaments or friendly games. Mullingar FC's competitive debut was made at Ballinasloe in September 1891. The logistics of reaching Ballinasloe illustrate the benefits and some of the difficulties presented by the rail companies to the embryonic GAA. The Mullingar club conducted the negotiations with the rail company and attempted to organise a special excursion train to the Galway town. However

The company required the very large guarantee of £42 which of course could not be given. Even the generous offer on the part of the club to guarantee £20 failed to induce the directors to run a special excursion train, and so the members were compelled to accept the next best thing, and that was to travel down on Saturday night at single fare for the double journey.⁷⁶

When the footballers arrived in Ballinasloe the reception party accompanied them to the Whelehan's Temperance Bar where they 'were provided with a sumptuous supper'.⁷⁷ On the Sunday morning the members made use of the available time to view the surrounding places of interest. After the games the 'festivities' began. 'Hall

⁷⁴ Lowerson, *Sport*, 95.

⁷⁵ *WN*, 28 Jan. 1892.

⁷⁶ *WE*, 26 Sept. 1891

⁷⁷ *WE*, 26 Sept. 1891.

and club were thrown open to the visitors, and singing and dancing kept up till the departure of the Mullingar men by the morning mail'.⁷⁸

There was a strong emphasis on socialising after games, and, on occasions, before matches and this was an important means of establishing a club's respectability. In May 1893, the Dublin club C. J. Kickhams' travelled to Mullingar to play a match with the Mullingar FC. They arrived at the railway station where 'an enthusiastic crowd of local footballers and townspeople' met them. They were then escorted to the rooms of the Catholic National Young Men's club 'where refreshments were lavishly provided and the best of good cheer was the order of the day for an hour or more'. Many of the Dubliners then took the opportunity to explore the two great attractions of Mullingar's hinterland and drove out to view either Lough Owel or Lough Belvedere.⁷⁹ This after match entertainment was still continuing in 1905 when this study concludes. The importance attached to this element of a club's activities is evident from the emphasis placed on its reportage in the press accounts of the games.

The importance of less formal socialisation is evident from surviving account material from a county Tipperary football (probably rugby football) team of the late 1870s, which provides evidence of the impact that the social dimension had on club finances. The Kilruane football club in 1876 purchased two footballs, a set of caps, several yards of tape and a book on football. The expenditure on these items amounted to £2 5s. 9d. or 55 per cent of the total. The remaining expenditure was on the purchase of two half-barrels of porter and four gallons of ale. The expenditure on basic equipment would suggest that 1876 was the start-up year for the club as in 1877 the proportion spent on alcohol and lemonade had increased to 76 per cent. This was invested in the purchase of four barrels of porter, one gallon and one quart of whiskey, one gallon of malt and three-dozen bottles of lemonade. The final year of the accounts indicate a similar pattern of expenditure on alcohol with transport also an important item for the 1879 season.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ *WE*, 26 Sept. 1891.

⁷⁹ *WN*, 22 June 1893.

⁸⁰ NLI, Account book of Kilruane football club, 1876, Ms. 9515.

Athlone T. P. O' Connor's began their campaign in fine social style, also against the Ballinasloe club. The Athlone National Band met the 'strangers' outside the town and escorted them to Mr. Lennon's premises where pre-match refreshments were served. After the game the members of the Athlone club entertained the Ballinasloe members 'to a sumptuous repast in Mr. O'Sullivan's hotel, Connaught Street. Dancing was subsequently enjoyed and the strangers departed at 10.00'.⁸¹ It wasn't unusual to have a team met at the railway station or on the outskirts of the town and accompanied to the football pitch or reception hall by one or more musical ensemble. This practice created a great sense of occasion; glamorised the participants, and was also a great publicity-generating device that drew the attention of the public to the event. Teams marching in military formation presented the footballers of the day with an opportunity to publicly display their orderliness, organisation and sense of mission.

Formal social occasions were also organised by clubs. Annual balls were organised by some clubs and the departure from the club of a prominent member was marked by the presentation of a testimonial that usually included a social event. The Kinnegad Slashers had a membership sufficiently organised in the early 1890s to hold an annual ball at the local national school building that was provided for the occasion by school patron, Fr. Fitzsimons.⁸² The support of the local cleric indicates clearly where the allegiance of this club rested. The 1893 occasion was attended by almost a hundred couples and 'the real old Irish jig, reel and hornpipe measures were indulged in to an advanced hour in the morning'.⁸³ The departure of J .J. Bergin, a founding member of both the Catholic Commercial Club and the Commercial Football Club was honoured by a social event that included dance music provided by May Brothers, 4 Stephen's Green, Dublin.⁸⁴

Those who played football in Westmeath in the early 1890s were participating in a recreational activity that had become fashionable within the county in the short term, an activity that promoted adventure and excitement for the individual in an often-mundane society, and one that facilitated and encouraged social interaction between individuals of similar status. The naming of the clubs in the county lends support to

⁸¹ *WI*, 15 Feb. 1890.

⁸² *WE*, 4 Feb. 1893.

⁸³ *WN*, 2 Feb. 1893.

⁸⁴ *WN*, 24 Nov. 1892.

this contention. The choice of name suggests that cultivating a nationalist agenda wasn't a priority for the members of many of the Westmeath clubs. In the early 1890s it was traditional for clubs to proclaim their nationalism by choosing a name that honoured a contemporary national political figure or one that commemorated a major figure or major event from Ireland's nationalist past.⁸⁵ The thirty-one county Meath clubs identified in the 1890 special branch report examined by Cronin all carried political names and all related to the IRB faction in the county.⁸⁶ A similar pattern is evident from an examination of the names of the twenty-five clubs included in the special branch reports on the county Longford clubs. The names of nineteen of these clubs had nationalist connotations that embraced contemporary political figures and movements.⁸⁷ Four of the clubs opted for a title with a religious connotation, the Ballymahon club immortalised local poet Leo O'Casey in their title while the Legan club appended 'sunbursts' to their title.⁸⁸ Cronin has suggested that this policy constructed an identity for clubs that stressed and publicised their links as sportsmen to the nationalist mission, that embraced things Irish and rejected West Britonism.⁸⁹ Of the nine Westmeath clubs identified in the police reports only two were identified with contemporary political figures (T. P. O'Connor and William O'Brien) and one with a contemporary movement (Rathowen Leaguers). Other appendages used included 'Shamrocks', 'Celtic', 'Emeralds', and proclaimed an Irish identity without any political or nationalist associations.⁹⁰

The contention that the men of Mullingar FC were essentially involved in a sporting and cultural activity is reinforced by their participation in the coalition of interests responsible for the organisation of the athletics meet in Mullingar on 2 October 1893. The organisers of this event included representatives of the widest spectrum of socio-political opinion in the town. The meet was held under GAA and ICA rules; the organising committee was mainly composed of members of the Catholic Commercial Club and associates of Mullingar FC; military representative Captain Lewis

⁸⁵ Mike Cronin, 'Enshrined in blood; the naming of Gaelic Athletic Association grounds and clubs', in *The Sports Historian*, 18, 1998, 91.

⁸⁶ Ibid. 95.

⁸⁷ The names used included John Dillon, Tim Healy, Michael Davitt, the Leaguers or nationalist icons from the past such as Daniel O'Connell, Hugh Roe O'Donnells, John Mitchell, Henry Grattan, Edward Fitzgerald and the Volunteers.

⁸⁸ CBS 2452/s

⁸⁹ Cronin, *Enshrined in blood*, 96.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

(Adjutant, 9th Battalion Rifle Brigade) provided a liberal subscription as well as the ropes for the enclosure and tenting facilities; Colour-Sergeant Sparkes was granted permission to assist the committee in carrying out all field arrangements; Mrs Lewis presented the prizes; the band of the Loyal North Lancashire regiment provided the musical entertainment and the socio-cultural ecumenism was appropriately concluded when Sergeant Lipsett of the RIC won the sixteen pound hammer throw.⁹¹

Club structure

This section explores the development of the club system in Westmeath by examining a number of case studies of some of the leading clubs in the county. Mullingar Commercials was the first club established in Mullingar on a formal basis. The initial meeting was held on 17 October 1889 at the licensed premises of Mr O'Sullivan, Greville Street. R.W. Moorwood and W. D. Cleary were the founding fathers of the club.⁹² At least thirty people attended the initial meeting when it was 'unanimously' agreed to organise a branch of the Gaelic Association in Mullingar and the following Sunday football was first played in Mullingar when two teams selected by the captain and secretary assembled at Ballyglass.⁹³ However, the new club almost imploded when some objected to the fact that some members had been elected on the field. A reconvened meeting was held which debated in detail the merits of the various football codes and eventually it was decided to establish a football club by a majority of fourteen votes to seven.⁹⁴ The name of this club gives a clear indication of the socio-economic background of its members. The occupations of the original committee elected by the club are illustrated in Table 27. The club had a relatively short existence and in the course of its two-year history played only six matches, winning only once.⁹⁵ This lack of success inspired the movement to amalgamate the Mullingar clubs.

⁹¹ *WG*, 22 Sept., 29 Sept., 6 Oct. 1893.

⁹² The only mention of R.W. Moorwood in Mullingar is in connection with football but the *Westmeath Independent* of 21 Sept. 1895 carried an advertisement from Roland Moorwood, 'the head agent for the Williams typewriter' described as 'the latest and most uptodate machine in the market'. His premises were located at 5, Upper Ormond Quay, Dublin.

⁹³ *WE*, 26 Oct. 1889.

⁹⁴ *WE*, 2 Nov. 1889. Rugby was the alternative choice.

⁹⁵ Tom Hunt, 'Mullingar sport', 23.

Name	Position	Occupation
R. W. Moorwood	Captain	Retail trade
P. J. Shaw	Vice-captain	Grocer-Publican family member
J. J. Geoghegan	Treasurer.	Supervisor at Doyne's drapery store.
M. J. Geary	Secretary	Shop assistant
W. D. Cleary	Committee	Publican
W. Fogarty	Committee	
W. Weymes	Committee	Wool merchant family member.
J. J. King	Committee	Shop assistant at Shaw's
C. Beirne	Committee	
J. J. Bergin	Captain of football team.	Nooney's ironmongery employee
James Mulvey	Committee	Kellaghan's ironmongery assistant.
J. H. Smith	Committee	Publican

Table 27: Occupations of officers and committee of Mullingar Commercial GAA club 1890.

Civic pride, motivated by the desire to form a strong competitive club, capable of challenging for county championship honours was responsible for the establishment of Mullingar Football Club. Three clubs, Commercial, the Shamrocks and Newbrook Wanderers were active in the town in 1891. In September 1891, a committee representative of the three was established with a view to amalgamating the clubs. The idea was approved and the committee were empowered to decide on a name for the new club. A majority favoured the neutral name of Mullingar FC for the composite club and this decision caused the Shamrock members to reject the proposal as they refused to accept any name other than their own. The lack of a political consciousness amongst the games playing members of the Mullingar clubs was highlighted by the failure of the name Emmett to gain even a single vote. The new club included all the members of the former Commercial, almost all the Newbrook Wanderers, and some members of the Shamrocks club. A membership fee of 1s. as well as a weekly subscription of 2d. was introduced for the new club which adopted a uniform of identity that included a red jersey with a green sash as well as a red cap with a green overhanging tassel. In November, it was reported that membership of the club was 'pretty well on the century'.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ *WN*, 5 Nov. 1891.

The appointed officers of the club in 1891 and 1892 were all involved in the commercial life of the town generally employed as shop assistants and many were non-natives.⁹⁷ President of the club, Martin McGreevey, was a native of Carrick-on-Shannon, county Leitrim and was an employee of Messrs. Shaw's one of the largest hardware, wine and spirits store in the town. Both the captain and treasurer were employees of Peter Kelleghan's drapery store. Brett, the treasurer was a Tipperary native and Mulvey, the captain was from Longford. Secretary, Thomas Raftery was from Loughrea, county Galway and had distinguished himself as a rugby player in his native county.⁹⁸ These officers with the exception of McGreevey, combined playing with their administrative duties. Of the fourteen players profiled in the *Westmeath Nationalist*, five were natives of the town, two were from Westmeath but outside the town and the remainder were non-natives. The main employment represented was that of assistant in the drapery, ironmonger or pub trade. The men involved were the leaders of their particular community. The vice-captain, Joe Garry, was an exception who farmed in association with his mother, at Clonmore, on the edge of the town.

The socio-cultural world of the members of Mullingar FC may be partly reconstructed by examining the contemporary newspapers. It was an era when young men working in white-collar occupations were becoming increasingly organised into social organisations that reflected the great Victorian desire for self-improvement. The most popular club with shop assistants and clerks was the Mullingar Catholic Commercial Club which was established in October 1890 with the objective of affording the members a means of 'social intercourse, mental and moral improvement and rational recreation'.⁹⁹ J. J. Geoghegan, a foreman in the ready-made department of James Doyne's drapery store was one of those mainly responsible for the club's formation. The ambitious, status conscious, professionally upwardly mobile young men could socialise at the club with employer and employee and develop useful business contacts in the process. James Mulvey was the undoubted leader of this community and served in a variety of administrative and authoritative offices that included both

⁹⁷ *WN*, 15 Dec. 1892. Following the success of the club in the Westmeath championship of 1892 the *Westmeath Nationalist* published a series of pen-pictures of the playing members and these form a useful source in compiling a socio-economic profile of the club's members. This information together with reports of testimonials presented to departing members has been the main source of information used in constructing the profile.

⁹⁸ *WN*, 11 Aug. 1892.

⁹⁹ *WG*, 7 Nov. 1890.

the captaincy of the Mullingar FC and the Mullingar Cricket Club and secretary of the county GAA committee. Much of the social life outside of sport was carried out in associations and organisations that were associated with the Catholic Church and clearly proclaimed allegiance to the Catholic faith. A core group were founding members of the Mullingar Catholic National Young Men's society, with James Mulvey elected treasurer and Patrick Brett secretary of the organisation. Clerical recommendation was responsible for the new club obtaining 'the largest of the front ground floor rooms' in Michael Doherty's Earl street premises at a monthly rent of £1.5s.¹⁰⁰ The entrance fee of 2s. 6d. and a monthly subscription fee of 2s. between 1 November and 1 May and 1s. for the remainder of the year ensured that membership was confined to those who were in regular employment and enjoyed a comfortable living standard. The success of the new organisation was such that within a month its headquarters were relocated to the 'more commodious and suitable suite directly over the premises occupied by the Singer Machine Company'.¹⁰¹ Many were also members of the Holy Family Confraternity, an organisation that mixed spiritualism, Catholic triumphalism, rational recreation and excursion. The rules of the confraternity required that the members engaged in daily prayer, attended the bi-monthly meetings and received monthly communion on the allocated Sunday. Fr Edward O'Reilly was spiritual director between 1883-1901 and he inaugurated the public processions and the excursions to the different parts of Ireland, which normally concluded with the athletic events that provided young Mullingar men with their first opportunity to compete in athletics. He also introduced a debating society to the organisation, established a library and secured a billiard table 'for the exclusive use of the members'.¹⁰² The members of the Mullingar football clubs displayed very little interest in party politics. Patrick Brett was a notable exception. In 1893 he was present at the general meeting of the Mullingar National Federation.¹⁰³

The second football club established in Mullingar was the Shamrocks club. The core membership of this club had already been in sporting association through the medium of the Mullingar Shamrocks Cricket Club that was active in 1888-89 playing at least

¹⁰⁰ *WN*, 12 Jan. 1893.

¹⁰¹ *WN*, 2 Feb. 1893.

¹⁰² *JMJ*, *Confraternity of the Holy Family Mullingar centenary review*, Mullingar, 1967, unnumbered pages.

¹⁰³ *WN*, 9 Feb. 1893.

five games each season. The members decided to extend their seasonal involvement in sport in February 1890 by forming a football club. The new club claimed a more extensive socio-economic base than the Commercials club and was described by the *Westmeath Guardian* as a

thoroughly representative and popular one. It embraces within its ranks the wealthy and humble, the business young man and the workingman, the employer and the artisan; all combined to promote the enjoyment of healthy and legitimate sport.¹⁰⁴

The playing record of this club has been described in detail in earlier sections of this chapter.

Thomastown Rangers was the most active of the early rural based clubs. Thomastown was a townland located within the civil parish of Killucan.¹⁰⁵ The story of the club is important as it illustrates how the early rural football clubs conducted their business. Although named Thomastown Rangers the club was a composite one, that drew its members and supporters from a number of surrounding townlands. The club relied on local subscriptions to fund its activities. At the annual meetings of the club, committee members were elected from surrounding townlands and these were the men charged with the responsibility of collecting subscriptions in their districts to fund the club for a season. The club was the most active of the early Westmeath clubs taking part in at least twenty matches between March 1888 and December 1891. Numerically the club was also secure, as on fourteen of these occasions it fielded a reserve selection also. After that date the club is recorded as having played only one additional match, the 1892 championship match against Mullingar FC. Members' tragedies were partly responsible for the club's demise. Club secretary Patrick Clinton died suddenly in December 1890 and the following October railway employee and playing member Laurence Brock was killed in a railway accident.¹⁰⁶ Club funds were invested and members subscribed to erect graveyard monuments to the memory of the deceased members and the remainder of the funds on hands was donated to the father

¹⁰⁴ *WG*, 14 Feb. 1890.

¹⁰⁵ A townland formed the smallest territorial unit of civil administration used in Ireland.

¹⁰⁶ *WE*, 13 DEC. 1890, 3 Oct. 1891.

of Laurence Brock.¹⁰⁷ It was announced at the county committee meeting in January 1893 that the Thomastown Rangers had amalgamated with the neighbouring club Raharney Rovers.¹⁰⁸

Neil Tranter has identified the crucial significance to the development of institutionalised sport ‘of considerable numbers of private individuals willing and able to serve as patrons’.¹⁰⁹ Patronage of institutional sport involved three basic types of assistance: donation of prizes for competitions, monetary subscriptions and, in the absence of public recreational grounds, the growth of organised sport was particularly dependent on the willingness of private landowners to grant sports participants access to land.¹¹⁰ The latter was of crucial importance to the development of the early GAA clubs. The Cullion Celtic club is a fine example of a club that depended on both monetary and facility-provision patronage. This club enjoyed the patronage of local landowner T. M. Reddy who was active in hunting, racing and golf.¹¹¹ Reddy founded the club, supplied the members with a ball, gave them a field ‘splendidly adapted for the purpose’ and was prepared to pay any affiliation fees required.¹¹² He also showed his support for the club by his presence with his wife and daughter at many of their games and by opening his house on occasion for the post-match entertainment and festivity.¹¹³ On occasions when Reddy returned to Argentina on business trips instructions were given that ‘the football club should be accommodated in every reasonable way’.¹¹⁴ The thirty-five members who attended the annual meeting in October 1892 were informed that they should feel especially grateful for ‘the use of two fields, one for practice matches and the other for (competitive) matches’.¹¹⁵ This largesse was provided at a time when some clubs struggled to gain the use of one field for football purposes. Obtaining the use of a suitable playing field was never a serious problem in Mullingar with at least six venues regularly used by the clubs. The members of Mullingar FC showed their appreciation to Thomas Murtagh who

¹⁰⁷ *WE*, 28 Jan. 1893.

¹⁰⁸ *WN*, 19 Jan. 1893.

¹⁰⁹ Neil Tranter, ‘The patronage of organised sport in central Scotland, 1820-1900’ in *Journal of Sports History*, 16, 3, 227.

¹¹⁰ Tranter, ‘Patronage’, 229-30.

¹¹¹ See Chapter 1, Chapter 2.

¹¹² *WE*, 22 Nov. 1890.

¹¹³ *WG*, 12 Dec. 1890.

¹¹⁴ *WN*, 5 May 1892.

¹¹⁵ *WN*, 20 Oct. 1892.

facilitated them by making available a field at Springfield. In December 1892 he was visited at his home by the club members and made a presentation of an ‘exceedingly handsome walking stick’ made of ‘polished ebony with silver band and Brazilian horn handle’. The gesture of recognition proved worthwhile as in his reply Murtagh informed the members that he was placing his house at their disposal also.¹¹⁶ Moate clubs, in contrast, had difficulty in accessing appropriate playing fields mainly due to the opposition of Canon Kearney who opposed football playing on a number of occasions because of its associations with alcohol consumption.

The most important club in the western half of the county was the T. P. O’Connor’s club established in December 1889 with the election of E. Doyle as captain, J. O’Flynn as secretary and R. Johnstone as treasurer. The secretary reported a membership of over forty ‘including some of the best athletes of the town and neighbourhood’.¹¹⁷ The choice of name is suggestive of a club with political consciousness but it also celebrated a local success story. T. P. O’Connor was an Athlone native and a *Daily Telegraph* journalist who was elected MP for Galway in 1880 and for Liverpool in 1885, a seat he retained to his death in 1929.¹¹⁸ In the opinion of the police the club was ‘kept up as for the pastime and not as a political club’.¹¹⁹ The club elected as President, Charles O’Donoghue, Ballinahown Court, a member of a leading landowning family in Westmeath.¹²⁰ O’Donoghue provided financial support to the club and also expressed his support by attending some of the more important competitive games. This club depended on the same economic constituency as the Mullingar FC for its membership with one notable difference. Members such as O’Flynn, Hogan, Foy, Doyle, and Monaghan were the sons of important and successful Athlone businessmen. Mullingar FC catered for employees; the T. P. O’Connor’s club core membership consisted of employers’ sons.

¹¹⁶ *WN*, 23 Dec. 1892.

¹¹⁷ *WI*, 4 Jan. 1890.

¹¹⁸ Jeremiah Sheehan, *Worthies of Westmeath*, Moate, 1987, 95-6. For an aspect of T. P. O’Connor’s career see Ian Sheehy, ‘T.P.O’Connor and The Star 1886-90’ in D. George Boyce and Alan O’Day (eds.) *Ireland in Transition, 1867-1921*, London, 2004, 76-91.

¹¹⁹ NA, CBS 1893, Western Division-county Roscommon; returns showing the number of branches of the GAA in the above county on 31/12/1892, 6247/S.

¹²⁰ *WI*, 18 Jan. 1890.

The competitive history of the T. P. O'Connor's club is important, as the vicissitudes experienced by the club illustrate in stark reality many of the difficulties experienced by the early GAA in achieving standardisation and compliance to an administrative structure. A Westmeath football championship was played in 1890 in which four clubs competed and was eventually won by the Athlone club in unsatisfactory circumstances when the Moate club walked off the field upset by the partisanship of the supporters.¹²¹ The next important occasion for the club was in August 1890 when the members travelled to Dublin to play the Isles of the Sea in a tournament game. Having led by 0-1 to 0-0 at half-time the club managed to lose the match by 6-11 to 0-2.¹²² Problems with the referee, it seems, were responsible for this debacle. The Athlone men were so upset by the decision to allow the first goal scored by the Dublin team that 'they stood up and let goal after goal pass them'. The *Westmeath Independent* reported that the Athlone men were not prepared for the foul play indulged in by opponents.¹²³ Athlone's problems continued in 1892 when permission to affiliate to the Westmeath county committee was refused as their entry fee allegedly arrived late. Instead the club affiliated in Roscommon and represented Connacht in the All-Ireland championship semi-final match against Dublin. Mid-way through the second half an incident happened that resulted in the Athlone team walking off the field. Allegedly without provocation, a Dublin player 'ran the length of the field and struck J. Monahan of Roscommon almost breaking his jaw'. Despite Athlone objections, Dublin was awarded the match and another perceived injustice was added to the Athlone list. The final problem happened within a matter of weeks when first the club were required to travel to Mullingar to compete against the Cullion Celtics in the county championship and then return the following week to play in the championship semi-final and final. The final ended in controversy with the Mullingar FC disputing the final score despite the fact that the referee was Martin McGreevey, who was both President of the Mullingar club and of the county committee. The Mullingar club contested the decision of the referee to award the game to the Athlone club to the highest level of the Association. The departure of the T. P. O' Connors club from the GAA, 'owing to the unfair treatment to which they had been subjected' was formalised in December 1893. Under their new title of the Athlone Association

¹²¹ *WI*, 10 May 1890. The captain of the Moate team who was responsible for withdrawing his team from the field was Frank Doran who was also the professional of the Moate Cricket Club.

¹²² *WI*, 30 Aug. 1890.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

Football Club ‘they bid fair to add many new triumphs to their record’.¹²⁴ On St Stephen’s Day, 1893 the Athlone Association Club played Bohemians in a friendly game. Ten of the eleven players were former prominent football players with the T. P. O’Connor’s club. This changeover energised Athlone soccer and introduced a new competitive perspective to the sport.

The story of the T. P. O’Connor’s club is important as it encapsulates many of the non-political difficulties that confronted the early association. In four of the most important games played by the club two were unfinished and two ended in controversy. The lack of a nationally accepted, clearly defined set of rules for the game applied consistently by referees familiar with their content caused difficulties on the occasions the club travelled to Dublin. Parochialism prevented their acceptance into the Mullingar dominated county committee and it was the failure of that body to recognise the championship victory of 1893 that precipitated the withdrawal from the GAA.

Socio-occupational status of footballers

The purpose of this section is to examine the socio-occupational status of footballers of the early 1890s. A list of 198 footballers active at this time was compiled and their identities investigated by using information contained in the enumerators’ forms of the 1901 census and also using information extracted from newspaper reports. 120 (60.6 per cent) of the individuals were identified, a number that is large enough to make some general conclusions on the social status and personal circumstances of the earliest footballers in Westmeath. The information is illustrated in Table 28. Seven clubs were used to compile this profile and included urban (77 players) and rural (121 players) organisations.

¹²⁴ *WN*. 4 Jan. 1894.

	Sample	B	Bi	Bii	Biii	C	Ci	Cii	Ciii	D	U
Corbetstown Home Rulers	24	8	-	-	8	1	-	-	1	7	8
Kinnegad Slashers	34	12	-	2	10	4	1	-	-	4	14
Raharney Rovers	21	2	-	-	2	2	2	-	-	6	11
Thomastown Rovers	23	11	-	1	10		-	-	-	6	6
Wooddown Rackers	19	9	-	-	9	1	1	-	-	2	7
Mullingar FC	43	2	-	-	2	20	5	14	1	6	15
Athlone	34	4	4	-	-	12	1	10	1	1	17
Total	198	48				40				32	78

Table 28: Social classes of footballers in Westmeath, 1892.

Members of social classes B and D dominated rural clubs. Those who identified themselves as farmers or farmers’ sons in 1901 were the most active football players in 1892 and formed 54.92 per cent of the identified rural total. Farm labourers, who formed social class D were the next most active group and accounted for 35.21 per cent of the group. In the urban areas, football was most popular with members of social class C and especially the white-collar representatives of the Cii group who formed 53.33 of the urban total. The remainder of this class were employed in various trades such as butcher, carpenter, wood-turner and a tailor. The evidence here suggests that the formation of the GAA wasn’t responsible for the sudden liberation of the poorer sectors of Irish society to the recreational fields as farmers and their sons significantly outnumbered farm labourers. Some progress had been made in meeting Davin’s desire to provide games for the ‘humble and the hard-working’ men that would provide an alternative to the ‘everlasting round of labour’. In Mullingar, six members of the unskilled or general labourer were active with the club.

As with other team sports, football playing was the reserve of the young man.¹²⁵ The age ranged between thirteen and thirty-three years; the average age of a rural football player in 1892 was 20.67 years. The uniformity in the average age of the football player was remarkable as the average age of the Mullingar player was 20.7 years with

¹²⁵ This was calculated by adjusting the age given in the 1901 forms to 1892. It would not be safe to make any statistical analysis of the conjugal status of this group in 1892 using the 1901 information.

his Athlone equivalent aged 20.56 years. Forty of the group were less than 20 years of age; thirty were aged between 20 and 24; seventeen between 25 and 29 and only two were over thirty.¹²⁶ The age profile also implied that these were mainly single men.

The soccer situation

The aim of this section is to examine the introduction and development of soccer to the county. Soccer on a formal basis was first played in Ireland on 24 October 1878 when two Scottish clubs, Caledonians and Queen's Park played an exhibition game in Belfast. This match was organised by a Belfast drapery store manager J. A. McAlery who was reputedly introduced to the game whilst on honeymoon in Scotland.¹²⁷ The following spring a team of Belfast players contested a friendly game with the Lenzie F.C. from Stirlingshire. The popularity of rugby and the difficulty in obtaining suitable playing grounds provided obstacles to the immediate adoption of the game in Belfast but in the autumn of 1879 the Cliftonville Club was formed from members of that club's cricket section. The club's committee attempted to popularise the game in the district and by April 1880 there were 'four thoroughly organized Clubs playing Association rules only', while there were 'several others occasionally practising them.' Moyola, Knock and Banbridge football clubs had joined Cliftonville as association football clubs and in their first season of existence twenty-three soccer games were played in the region.¹²⁸ According to Peters, the game was also introduced to the Irish midlands as St Stanislaus College in Tullamore had formed a soccer club.¹²⁹

The introduction of soccer on an organised basis to Westmeath first happened in the Athlone area and can be precisely dated to January 1887. This was due to the personal initiative of Orlando Coote, a man who possessed aristocratic credentials of the highest order. His brother, Algernon, was a graduate of Eton, Cambridge and Trinity Colleges and although no information is available on Orlando's education, inevitably, given his background he received a public school education where he was exposed to

¹²⁶ It was possible to identify the occupational status of 120 players but it was only possible to establish the age of eighty-nine of these. The age of only seven Athlone players could be established with certainty as opposed to seventeen occupations.

¹²⁷ Brodie, *Irish football*, 2. See also Ian Nannestad 'The origin of association football in Ireland', in *Soccer History*, 5, 2003, 8-11. Garnham, *Association football*, 2-41.

¹²⁸ Garnham, *Origins and development of football*, 162-8.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, 163.

the ideals of muscular Christianity and the games ethic that was common in these institutions.¹³⁰ Coote's career in Athlone as a pioneer of sport and administrator indicates a familiarity with a variety of sports and their operational codes. He was employed in Athlone as a land agent, one of the traditional sources of employment favoured by the younger sons of landed gentry families.¹³¹

The first soccer club was established in Athlone in January 1887 due to the direct influence of Coote, who according to the *Westmeath Independent*, had founded 'successful clubs in Castlerea and other places he resided'.¹³² A Mr S. Wilson had offered the use of his large field 'the entrance to which is from Northgate street, opposite the Town Hall'.¹³³ The game in its initial manifestation in Athlone was an elitist activity. Training sessions, entrance fees and the organisation of games, restricted access to those who were financially secure and time rich. Members were required to make an initial subscription of 5s. to join the club, the initial training session was timed for three o' clock on Monday afternoon and the earliest games of the club were played on Wednesday afternoons. Travel to games in Dublin and participation in the post-match socialisation required disposable income and this also restricted membership. The membership fee remained constant as seven years later it remained at 5s., with a non-playing membership of 2s. 6d. also available.¹³⁴ The new club was also closely associated with the Ranelagh School, which supplied officers, players and a new playing pitch when Wilson's field was 'vacated in favour of the Rugby fraternity as the Ranelagh pitch was more suitable to skilful ground football'.¹³⁵ The school ground from that time became the venue for the most important games played by the club and other Athlone-based clubs during the period of this study.

The nature of its early committees and office holders are indicative of the initial gentry and upper-middle class influence. Those elected to office in 1887 and 1888 are

¹³⁰ *Burke's Peerage and Baronetage*, London, 1911, 637-8. He was the third son of Ireland's premier baronet, Rev. Sir Algernon Coote and although the family's ancestral seat was located at Ballyfin, Queen's county, the family resided at Wavertree, Tunbridge Wells in Kent.

¹³¹ Dooley, *Big house*, 77.

¹³² *WI*, 8 Jan. 1887.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *WI*, 20 Oct. 1894.

¹³⁵ *WI*, 16 Feb. 1887.

illustrated in Table 29. Coote and Hodson represented the landed gentry; Milligan and Geoghegan were members of two of Athlone’s leading business families, the former associated with one of the town’s leading drapery and millinery stores and the latter’s family were proprietors of the Prince of Wales Hotel. Captain Inglis was elected to the committee in 1888 as a representative of the Royal Artillery, whilst Langstaff and Jeffers were teachers at the Ranelagh School.¹³⁶

Position	
Captain	O.R. Coote
Secretary	H. Milligan
Treasurer	P. B. Treacy
Committee	M. Geoghegan, T. Langstaff, J. Hodson, W. Jeffers and Captain Inglis.

Table 29: Office holders in Athlone AFC in 1887 and 1888.

The new club, called the Athlone Association Football Club had an active first three months of existence and contested seven games. The first match was played on 9 February 1887 when Orlando Coote captained the club in a scoreless draw against Castlerea, a club also founded by Coote. Two games were played against the Athlone based garrisons, a game against Ranelagh School, as well as games with a Trinity College team and a selection of Dublin AFC that included ‘four first eleven Trinity men and four first eleven Dublin AFC men’. Castlerea also provided the opposition for the final game of the season.¹³⁷ In this initial season seventeen different players were used, and eleven of these were either teachers or students of the Ranelagh School. The relationship continued in 1888 when, in the first game of the season, six players from the school represented the club in the game against Dublin AFC.¹³⁸ Orlando Coote was also part of this team that included two members of the military, Capt. Inglis and Lt. W. N. Bolton. The club remained active throughout 1888 and 1889 but from April of that year its rate of activity declined with only one game played in 1891 and 1892. The playing record of the club in its first three seasons is summarised in Table 30.

¹³⁶ *WI*, 3 Nov. 1888. *WI*, 16 Feb. 1887. Both were listed on the Ranelagh School rugby football team that defeated Roscommon.
¹³⁷ *WI*, 18 Feb. 1887, 5 March 1887, 12 March 1887, 19 March 1887, 26 March 1887, 2 April 1887.
¹³⁸ *WI*, 7 Jan. 1888.

	Played	Won	Drew	Lost
1887	7	5	0	2
1888	9	3	2	4
1889	10	5	1	4

Source: *Westmeath Independent*.

Table 30: Record of Athlone Association Football Club 1887-89.

At this stage soccer in the county was locally based, informal and devoid of structure and formal competition, and restricted to a narrow social group. In this phase of development friendly matches were organised based on personal contact within a socially restricted network.

Schools and recreation

The Ranelagh School was one of the most important centres of education in Westmeath and was one of three schools in the county that equated to the English model of the public school. Two of these schools, Ranelagh School and Farra School were under the patronage and superintendence of the Incorporated Society for Promoting English Protestant Schools in Ireland, a society that supported six schools in Ireland.¹³⁹ Initially, sport participation in schools was seen simply as a way of filling the days of pupils and as a means of diverting them from less acceptable pastimes. From this position, games were seen as essential because of their health-promoting virtues. Both schools, in their advertisements, emphasised the importance of their health promotion philosophies and the role games participation played in this process. In Farra ‘the greatest possible care was bestowed upon the health and domestic comfort of the Pupils’ and as a means to this end ‘cricket and other outdoor games were encouraged’. Ranelagh School advertised a situation that was ‘most healthful’, with a playground that was large and well adapted for School Games, to which great attention was paid by the Principal.¹⁴⁰ According to the Principal, Mr. Bailie, there was a ‘wholesome rule’ in the school that required all boys at the school ‘to go out two days a week and take their turns at the games, whether cricket, football or hockey’ and ‘this involvement accounted for the excellent health of the boys’. The school endeavoured to develop muscular as well as mental power, according to Bailey

¹³⁹ *Ellis's Irish Education Directory for 1887 (Sixth year of issue)*, Dublin, 1887, 153.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 273, 281.

in his 1890 end of term address, a time when the school had 119 pupils on its roll.¹⁴¹ The numbers enrolled had grown steadily since 1880 when there were sixty-seven boys in the school, forty-eight boarders and nineteen day boys of whom three were Catholics. Seven years later there was a total of 117 boys in the school, the vast majority of whom were Protestants, with a few Wesleyans and Presbyterians and seven Catholic dayboys.¹⁴² In the 1890s muscular Christianity had become part of the ethos of Irish educational establishments.¹⁴³ This was based on the belief that physical activity played a crucial role in developing Christian gentlemen, by teaching courage, self-reliance and character building through the playing of sport. There is evidence that schools under the control of Catholic religious orders had also some involvement in soccer playing. In 1903, the Marist Brothers', St Mary's Intermediate School, in Athlone played matches against the Ranelagh School.¹⁴⁴ In 1905, the Mullingar Christian Brothers School was involved in matches with the Franciscan College in Multyfarnham. The latter school was particularly active in 1904 and 1905 and competed successfully in a junior tournament organised by the Mullingar St. Patrick's club.¹⁴⁵ Despite its association with the soccer code the Ranelagh School's chief sporting interest was in rugby football.

Rugby was the more popular and promoted game in Ranelagh school and its Farra counterpart. Former pupils of English public schools who later attended Trinity College introduced rugby to Ireland. In 1854, some former pupils of the Rugby and Cheltenham schools in England formed a rugby club at the university. Over the next five years the Trinity club's activity was confined to internal games with students forming makeshift teams organised on the basis of places of birth, places of education, alphabetical order, and involvement in other sports. Two members of the Trinity club formulated rules for the game, in October 1868. The first-ever recognised international match took place in 1871 and in February 1879 a unified Irish Rugby Football Union was formed to manage and promote the game.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴¹ *WI*, 27 Dec. 1890.

¹⁴² Michael Quane, 'Ranelagh Endowed School, Athlone', in *Journal of the Old Athlone Society*, 1, 1969, 32.

¹⁴³ Garnham, *Association football*, 22-23

¹⁴⁴ *Slater's Directory*, 1892, 17. *WI*, 14 Nov. 1903, 19 Dec. 1903.

¹⁴⁵ *WE*, 6 Feb. 1904; 5 March 1904; 26 March 1904; 16 April 1904; 30 April 1904; 25 March 1905.

¹⁴⁶ Garnham, 'Introduction', 5-7. Edmund Van Esbeck, *The Story of Irish Rugby*, London, 1986, 12-37.

The Trinity link was crucial to the introduction of rugby to the Farra and Ranelagh Schools as the two headmasters who promoted sport in the schools, T. C. Foster and Robert Bailie had graduated from the college.¹⁴⁷ A Trinity education pre-supposes attendance at a public school where undoubtedly the two gentleman were exposed to the games ethic of these establishments. These formative influences were reflected in the policies they then pursued as headmasters. The first recorded rugby game in the county was played between the schools at Farra, on 25 February 1879 and appropriately was drawn.¹⁴⁸ This game came a year after the appointment of Bailie to the post of principal at Ranelagh.¹⁴⁹ Teams for these games combined masters and students and for the initial game T. C. Foster captained the Farra side and four years later he was still 'A1' at fullback against the Royal School, Cavan.¹⁵⁰ In the 1885 game between Farra and Ranelagh, the latter included 'four masters and two past men'.¹⁵¹ According to a contemporary pupil 'fierce, often venomous games of football' were popular in Farra. The style of football played, 'no rules, no bounds except a lake or a river', was likely to 'rouse, mad, wild passion in the players'. Games were played with one half of the school taking on the other in a style of rugby that 'was only less a scrimmage than the other sort, contemptuously described by us as the kind the soldiers played'.¹⁵²

From 1879 both schools organised regular games with schools of a similar status and maintained the link with Trinity by organising games with the college. Farra School, until its closure in April 1898, offered a comprehensive rugby programme and the school was one of seven entrants for the inaugural Leinster Senior Schools Cup in 1887.¹⁵³ In 1892, the Farra school fixtures included two games against Cavan Grammar School and the Trinity College 2nd XV, games against Longford 1st XV and Portora Royal School from Enniskillen, county Fermanagh and games in the Leinster Schools Cup against Dundalk and a final defeat to Blackrock College.¹⁵⁴ Ranelagh

¹⁴⁷ Both graduated at the level of M.A.

¹⁴⁸ *WG*, 28 Feb. 1879.

¹⁴⁹ Quane, *Ranelagh*, 32.

¹⁵⁰ *WG*, 23 Nov. 1883.

¹⁵¹ *WG*, 11 Dec. 1885.

¹⁵² Bullock, *Sixty Years*, 79-80. I am indebted to Neal Garnham for this reference. Bullock was a student in Farra School from 1878-79.

¹⁵³ *WG*, 21 April 1898.

¹⁵⁴ *WG*, 22 April 1892.

School in the 1889 and 1890 seasons also played eight matches against selections from Galway Grammar School, Birr, Portarlinton and Longford.¹⁵⁵

Despite the popularity of rugby in the schools, the game did not transfer to the civilian population. Only one reference to rugby in Mullingar was discovered in researching this study. This dates to December 1880 when the Farra School defeated Mullingar. The Mullingar team were reported to be playing their first match and the report concluded that 'it should be mentioned that the Mullingar team played two men short'.¹⁵⁶ The absence of local opposition was discussed at the AGM of the Farra club in September 1885 and was considered the 'one great drawback' as 'competition in such a game has certainly a very beneficial effect, particularly in a school team'. This was at a time when 'almost every village in the county has had its cricket club'.¹⁵⁷ The relative isolation of Farra from Mullingar, its nearest urban centre, may partly explain why rugby diffusion failed to take place to the civilian population. This explanation however does not apply to Athlone where Ranelagh School was at the centre of various recreational activities. Both schools were primarily boarding schools where students were educated in isolation from the local communities and, on completion of their schooling, progressed to university or pursued careers in areas where their influence as rugby missionaries may have been important. The absence in both towns of a rugby playing army regiment was also an important factor in the failure of rugby to develop a profile of any significance.

The cult of games in both schools also extended to the promotion of athletics. Associated annual athletics meets were organised from 1885 in Ranelagh and in Farra from 1886.¹⁵⁸ These events generally consisted of standard foot races and other track and field fare, as well as a number of novelty events to encourage wide participation. The 1889 Farra sports promoted events open to the entire county that had previously been confined to residents in the immediately locality of the school. This meet was

¹⁵⁵ *WI*, 20 April 1889, 27 Dec. 1890.

¹⁵⁶ *WG*, 17 Dec. 1880.

¹⁵⁷ *WG*, 25 Sept. 1885.

¹⁵⁸ *WG*, 25 June 1886.

noteworthy as it marked the first reported competitive performance of Walter Newburn who finished second in the senior boys 220 yards race.¹⁵⁹

Work-place sport

The opportunity to participate in soccer was not limited to those associated with Ranelagh School at this time. There is also evidence of working class involvement in soccer at this time in Athlone. Tony Mason in his study of association football has identified the workplace as a source of origin for football clubs.¹⁶⁰ The Athlone Woollen Mills were the largest industrial establishment in the county at this time. The employees of this particular firm benefited from the paternalism of the Smith family, the proprietors. Sport was included amongst the range of benevolent interventions promoted at the concern. Cricket, athletics and soccer were encouraged and included what was claimed to be the first athletic meeting held in the area that presented the working classes with an opportunity to compete. The programme included a girls' race that attracted an entry of eleven.¹⁶¹ Earlier in the year a football match under GAA rules was played between the woollen mills and the sawmill employees.¹⁶²

According to a contemporary report the management have 'experienced it as a portion of the secret of their success that the best principle to be worked on is "all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy"'. Annually, the employers organised dance parties and soirees, granted the usual popular holidays and supported an annual excursion such as the 1892 visit to Dublin.¹⁶³ Soccer was part of the sporting curriculum for the workers and from 1892-4 the Athlone Woollen Mills are featured in match reports, all of them against military combinations.

Change in social status and competitive nature of soccer

The organisation and management of soccer in the Athlone district was altered fundamentally in the 1893-94 season. This development and subsequent boost to soccer in Athlone resulted from the decision of the members of the T. P. O'Connor

¹⁵⁹ *WG*, 22 June 1889, 12 July 1889. As stated earlier Newburn, on 16 July 1898 became the first athlete in history to long-jump over twenty-four feet when he jumped twenty-four feet and a half-inch in the international match against Scotland at Ballsbridge. See Chapter 3.

¹⁶⁰ Mason, *Association football*, 29.

¹⁶¹ *WI*, 4 Sept. 1886.

¹⁶² *WI*, 1 May 1886. The game in which 'no special rules seemed to be observed' ended scoreless.

¹⁶³ *WI*, 16 July 1892.

GAA Club to withdraw from the GAA 'owing to the unfair treatment to which they had been subjected' and as soccer players 'bid fair to add many new triumphs to their record'.¹⁶⁴ The immediate cause of the rift from the GAA was the decision of the members of the Mullingar FC to contest the decision of the referee to award the winning goal to the Athlone team in the 1893 Westmeath county football final.¹⁶⁵ As a result, a body of experienced and competitive footballers switched their allegiance to the soccer code and the impact on the Athlone Association Football Club was dramatic and immediate. The club now involved itself in national competition and its social composition changed from one dominated by school representatives to one that catered for the middle-class clerks and shop assistants of the town. This group were experienced competitive footballers and the success enjoyed by them in their adopted code is indicative of the extent to which the essential skills of both codes were transferable at this stage.

Involvement in a competitive structure was facilitated by affiliation to the new Leinster provincial council established in 1892. This body organised a new competition, the Leinster Junior Cup, for which Athlone was one of fourteen entrants and the only one from outside Dublin city.¹⁶⁶ The standard of soccer played in Athlone at the time developed from the interaction with, and exposure to, army skills and expertise and the extent to which the football skills and competitive instincts of the individuals had been developed on the Gaelic football fields is indicated by the fact that the club were successful in their competitive debut winning the Leinster Junior Cup in the 1893-4 season. In this competition, the leading metropolitan clubs, the GPO, the Nomads, St Helen's and Britannia were defeated without the concession of a goal. The following season was equally successful as Britannia, Bohemians and the GPO were beaten as the title was defended.¹⁶⁷ The promotion to senior football that followed these results proved to be less successful. Travel to Belfast to challenge Glentoran in the Irish Senior Cup resulted in a 7-1 defeat; this was followed by a 2-1

¹⁶⁴ *WN*, 4 Jan. 1894

¹⁶⁵ *WE*, 27 April 1893. The events that precipitated the decision have been explained in detail earlier in the chapter.

¹⁶⁶ Lynch, *Athlone FC*, 13-15.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 13-22.

victory against Hibernians from Dublin in the Leinster Senior Cup semi-final that concluded with a 2-1 final loss to Bohemians.¹⁶⁸

Former Gaelic football players dominated the Athlone FC in its two most successful seasons. In the four matches played in the Leinster campaign of 1893, seventeen different players were used. Eight of these had played on the T. P. O'Connor club team in the P. W. Nally memorial tournament mentioned above. The 1893 soccer season concluded with an exhibition match played on St Stephen's Day between Athlone and Bohemians. Ten of the Athlone team were former prominent football players. Apart from the transferability of skills, this example of football crossover from Athlone illustrates the perception of football by its devotees as a recreational activity devoid of political connotations. Football playing at this stage, despite the best efforts of the GAA at national level, had yet to be equated with a nationalist identity in Westmeath. The men who transferred their football allegiance in 1893 included Parnellite nationalists who at the conclusion of the P. W. Nally memorial game joined their supporters and marched to Glasnevin to place a wreath on Parnell's grave.¹⁶⁹

Name	Nature of business	Address
Smith, H.	Athlone Woollen Mills	Devenish Court
Foy, E.	Pawnbroker	Church street
Connell, H.	Grocer & spirit dealer	Church street
Hannon, W., TC.	Grocer & spirit dealer	Connaught street
Macken, J.	Grocer & provision dealer	Mardyke street
Hogan, T. J.	Stationer	Church street
Conway, J & M. J.	Rate collectors	
Campbell, J.	Grocer & spirit dealer	Connaught street
Monahan, J.	Publican & earthen-ware dealer	Connaught street
O'Flynn P.	Grocer & spirit-dealer	High street
Geoghegan, M., TC & PLG	Hotel Proprietor	Church street
Doyle, E.J.	Grocer & spirit dealer	Connaught street
Turkington, J.	Baker & game dealer	King street
Milligan, H.	Milliners & drapers	Church street
Gladstone, R.	Grocer & spirit dealer	Queen street

Source of occupations: *Slater's Directory* , 1892, 16-19.

Table 31: Names, business and place of residence of those attending the AGM of Athlone AFC, in October 1894.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 22-26.
¹⁶⁹ *WI*, 10 Sept. 1892.

The Athlone Association Football Club became much more closely associated with the business community of the town, a development that is reflected in the attendance at the 1894 annual meeting. Orlando Coote maintained the connection with the original committee and was elected President. R Jeffers was elected to the committee, and continued the connection with the Ranelagh School. P.V. C. Murtagh, a lawyer, J. Radden, an engineer, and P. B. Treacy, the petty-sessions clerk was also elected to the club committee. The remaining sixteen who attended the meeting were associated with the town's business community as illustrated in Table 31 above.

Shop assistants and clerks constituted the main core of the playing population of the club at this time. Fifteen different players were used in the 1894 and 1895 Leinster junior cup finals and it has been possible to positively identify eight of these. All were engaged in white-collar occupations including shop assistants, commission agents, loan officers and clerks. Of these Edward Foy, Michael O'Flynn, Thomas Hogan, Jim Monaghan and Jim Campbell were members of well-established Athlone business families. Maurice Norton, the goalkeeper on the 1894 team obviously believed that an association with a successful soccer team was of some commercial value as he advertised his newly established victualler's store in Wentworth Street using the headline 'footballer'. The close association between the commercial sector of the town and association football at this time was further solidified by the use of the rooms of the Commercial Club in Excise Street as an entertainment venue for travelling teams.¹⁷⁰ Apart from the commercial dimension, the club at this stage also had a strong neighbourhood identity with Connaught Street and Church Street particularly well represented. Neighbourhood association was an important factor in the formation of British football clubs, formed of what were, as Holt has observed, 'probably childhood playmates who graduated from street games to street teams'.¹⁷¹ Some of those involved in the Athlone Association Football club at this time would have shared similar childhood experiences.

The role of the military

The importance of the military in popularising certain sports is a recurring theme in Irish sports history and the introduction of soccer to the county provides an

¹⁷⁰ *WI*, 17 March, 24 March 1894.

¹⁷¹ Holt, *Sport and the British*, 154.

opportunity to examine the validity of the thesis as it relates to soccer.¹⁷² The earliest reference to soccer in the county provides a classic example to support the notion of military involvement in the promotion of the game as it included an inter-regimental game, an offer to play games against civilian sides and a willingness to explain the rules. In November 1878 the *Westmeath Guardian* announced a match between the Beverley Rovers and the 1st Battalion of the 15th Regiment, in the 'field adjoining the Barracks, on Wednesday 20th November', in Mullingar.¹⁷³ Spectators were promised that the rules of the Association as 'played throughout the United Kingdom would be carried out', and they would also have the 'opportunity of impressing the technicalities of the game on their mind'. The Battalion members also announced their willingness to meet any team in a friendly match at any time during the season and 'to give every information on the rules of the game'.¹⁷⁴ Unfortunately there was no further report of this game and newspaper references to soccer in Mullingar are scarce for the 1880s and 1890s.

An analysis of the newspaper reports of games played in the period 1887-1905 does offer further evidence that the military played an important role in its development in the county. This role chiefly involved providing opposition for the local civilian clubs, particularly in Athlone. Inter-regimental games provided public demonstrations of the codes and skills of the game and developed its public profile. In the period 1887-1905, 241 games were reported in the local press and 119 (49.4 per cent) involved a military team. Of these 119 games forty-nine were intra- or inter-regimental ones. The military involvement was relatively constant over the period, as can be seen from a few examples of the playing records of regimental teams. The soccer club of the Athlone based Royal Artillery concluded its 1891 season with a record of five wins and two losses in seven games in which they scored twenty-six goals and conceded twelve.¹⁷⁵ Between October 1904 and December 1905 the team attached to the Connaught Rangers played at least twenty-four games whilst based in Mullingar.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷² Bairner *Ireland*, 63.

¹⁷³ The Beverley Rovers were presumably a military team.

¹⁷⁴ *WG*, 15 Nov. 1878.

¹⁷⁵ *WI*, 30 March 1891.

¹⁷⁶ Based on newspaper reports carried in the *Westmeath Examiner*, *Westmeath Independent*, *Midland Reporter* and the *Westmeath Guardian* over the period.

This period of intense military involvement in soccer locally and at regimental level coincided with a time when the promotion of physical fitness and involvement in sport had become centrally important in army training. The importance of sport to the lives of soldiers is reflected in regimental newsletters and journals that are dominated by sports reports and debate.¹⁷⁷ Soccer was the most popular sport in the late Victorian army with the popularity of a sport mediated partly by where a regiment was from and partly influenced by the preference of the officers.¹⁷⁸ Regiments held tournaments at the company level, partly to identify and train younger players for selection to the regimental teams.¹⁷⁹ Games of this category were common in Athlone and Mullingar and their popular appeal was important in popularising the game. On occasion they presented an entertainment package that included music provided by the regimental band, to accompany the football. The October 1890, game between the East Lancashire Regiment and the Grenadier Guards attracted a large number of spectators that included ‘a number of the poor demented inmates of the Institution’. During the game the ‘band of the Lilywhites...discoursed a nice selection of music’.¹⁸⁰ In February 1893, the South Lancashire Regiment hosted a three-day tournament in Athlone, which included the other main players of the game, the 2nd Battalion of the East Kent Regiment (Buffs), Ranelagh School and the Athlone FC.¹⁸¹ In April, the final of the regimental shield between G and D companies of the South Lancashire regiment attracted an ‘immense crowd of spectators’.¹⁸² The integration of the various football interests in the town is evident from a number of games played in March and April 1892. On St. Patrick’s Day an Athlone selection of footballers played Ballinasloe in a rugby game and this was followed in April by two soccer matches that resulted from a challenge delivered by the Athlone clubs representing soccer, rugby and football to the RIF.¹⁸³ According to Campbell, the amount of time and energy spent by soldiers on football, as compared to time spent on regimental duties, was far more than one would normally expect for mere leisure time.

¹⁷⁷ Campbell, ‘Sport and the army’, 43

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, 45.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 47.

¹⁸⁰ *WI*, 31 Oct. 1890.

¹⁸¹ *Athlone Times*, 11 Feb. 1893.

¹⁸² *WN*, 20 April 1893.

¹⁸³ *WI*, 26 March 1892; 23 April 1892; 7 May 1892.

The military also had an impact on the development of the game by providing players to local teams, although in Westmeath this was an occasional occurrence. In the early years in Athlone, the club benefited from the skills of two members of the Wiltshire Regiment. Capt. Inglis and Lt. Bolton were regulars in the 1887-88 season and featured in the lists of goal scorers.¹⁸⁴ Driver Jackson, reportedly a former Blackburn Rovers player, was another whose talents were used by the civilian side and he was included in at least one match in the initial and successful Leinster junior cup campaign.¹⁸⁵ The T.P. O'Connor football club also used his talent when it played in Dublin in the P. W. Nally memorial tournament.¹⁸⁶ His Royal Artillery regiment publicised their willingness to play any team in the Athlone hinterland under association rules. Soldiers Barrett and Armstrong of the Connaught Rangers were members of the Mullingar, St. Patrick's team on occasion also.¹⁸⁷

At a time when access to a suitable playing field wasn't always possible the contribution of both the military and Ranelagh School in making available recreational space was significant. The Queen's Meadow in Athlone was the property of the War Office and was maintained to a high standard. Civilians had access to this ground for football and cricket games 'permission for same being made in days and at times on which the ground is not otherwise engaged'.¹⁸⁸

The Mullingar situation

There is no clear point of origin for the introduction of soccer to Mullingar, nor can the introduction of the game be credited to individual initiative similar to that of Orlando Coote. As described earlier, the game was certainly played by military personnel based in the town and the early newspaper reports of the game refer to matches between various companies from the Mullingar based regiments. In 1883, the *Westmeath Examiner* advertised a match between the 5th Northumberland Fusiliers and the Mullingar club but again, like the example quoted above, there was no follow

¹⁸⁴ *WI*, 17 Dec. 1887; 31 Dec. 1887. Also Lynch, *Athlone*, 9-10. Lieutenant Bolton was described as an English international although his name does not appear on any compendium of English international players.

¹⁸⁵ *WI*, 14 Feb. 1891, 24 Feb. 1894.

¹⁸⁶ *WI*, 27 Aug. 1892.

¹⁸⁷ *WG*, 30 Dec. 1904.

¹⁸⁸ *WI*, 23 May 1891

up report.¹⁸⁹ The first reported game between civilian teams was played between the Victors and the Green Road and took place in October 1893 and was refereed by Daniel Earl of the Mullingar Football Club.¹⁹⁰ The only properly constituted civilian soccer club that developed in Mullingar during the period of this study was the St. Patrick's Club, an organisation that oscillated between playing football and soccer in the early years of its existence. It was active in football since 1896 and in soccer from 1899, playing both games during a season.¹⁹¹ This code switching was common at the time and not unique to Westmeath. The Cookstown Swifts club began in football but switched to soccer due to the lack of local opposition and like Athlone T. P. O'Connor's, turned to rugby in the 1890s after losing an appeal to the IFA over a contested cup-tie. The Laune Rangers Football Club in Kerry originated as a rugby club.¹⁹² At this stage compliance to a single code in team sports had yet to develop. For at least twenty years after the formation of the GAA there was a continual crossover between team games such as cricket, soccer and football in Westmeath. The changed circumstances that introduced demarcation lines in sport will be examined in the final chapter.

Military influence was important in introducing the young men of the St Patrick's Club to the soccer game. Comparing the manuscript census returns of 1901 with a list of names associated with the club indicated that some members resided in Patrick Street, Mullingar. This street was located close to the military barracks and it is reasonable to conclude that young boys in the area would have discovered the game by watching the soldiers in play. The club eventually opted for soccer and affiliated to the Leinster Football Association in 1903. This was the club's busiest season and the seven games contested included first round defeats in both the Leinster junior cup and All-Ireland junior cup competitions.¹⁹³ The 1904 competitive season ended with a 5-0 home defeat to the Athlone team in the Leinster junior cup and the match report gives an indication of the quality of the play of the Mullingar team. According to the reporter

¹⁸⁹ *WE*, 17 March 1883.

¹⁹⁰ *WN*, 26 Oct. 1893.

¹⁹¹ *WG*, 14 May 1896; *WE*, 2 Dec. 1899.

¹⁹² Garnham, *Origins*, 171.

¹⁹³ *WE*, 14 March 1903, 4 April 1903, 9 May 1903, 3 Oct. 1903, 24 Oct. 1903, 31 Oct. 1903, 5 Dec. 1903.

Mullingar had plenty of vigour but lacked every other quality. Mullingar lacked every essential that goes to make a successful team. Their combination was nothing while their play around goal was ridiculous. The most magnificent opportunities being thrown away by them and in point of lasting powers they simply were not in it.¹⁹⁴

This series of defeats, coupled with an incident in an St Stephen's Day match when a Dublin player accidentally suffered a broken leg, ended the activity of the St Patrick's Club. A new club, Glenmore, was formed of the same core group of players who played a number of friendly games in 1905.¹⁹⁵ At the same time, both Athlone clubs re-constituted themselves with the formation of the Connaught Wanderers and the Rebel clubs, both of which affiliated to the Leinster association for the 1905-6 season.¹⁹⁶ Although the St. Patrick's Club may have eventually opted for soccer individual members of the club continued to play football. Newbrook Wanderers, a team that included eight members of the St. Patrick's soccer club, won the first football tournament organised in Mullingar in 1903.¹⁹⁷ The players included James Reynolds, the captain of the St. Patrick's F.C. and H. Stenson, the vice-captain.¹⁹⁸

The post-1900 situation

The piecemeal nature of soccer in the Athlone district is illustrated by developments following the successful 1894 and 1895 seasons. The Leinster Senior Cup final defeat was followed in early 1897 by a 13-5 defeat by the Lancashire Fusiliers and these reverses seem to have dimmed the enthusiasm of the members for the game.¹⁹⁹ The period between 1896-1900 was dominated by military games with eighteen of the thirty-three matches played in Athlone inter-regimental. There is evidence of the game developing in the rural hinterland of Athlone, in Glasson, Blary, Drumraney, Coosan, Bealnamullia, Tubberclare, Auburn and the Moydrum districts.²⁰⁰ A number of games between clubs in these districts were reported. These were attractive in rural

¹⁹⁴ *WI*, 10 Dec. 1904

¹⁹⁵ *WG*, 31 March 1905, 28 April 1905, 12 May 1905; *WE*, 5 Nov. 1905, 16 Dec. 1905.

¹⁹⁶ *WI*, 16 Sept. 1905.

¹⁹⁷ Joseph Garry was the Vice-President of the Young Ireland football club and was accidentally killed in a rail accident in October 1903. Of the thirteen members of the St. Patrick's club present at the funeral, eight were on the Newbrook Wanderers team that won the tournament.

¹⁹⁸ *WE*, 3 Oct. 1903.

¹⁹⁹ *WI*, 24 April 1897. The Lancashire Fusiliers were particularly successful in the Army Cup competition in the 1896-7 season eventually reaching the United Kingdom final where they were defeated by the Royal Artillery (Portsmouth), in final watched by 15,000 to 20,000 people.

²⁰⁰ For examples of these inter-rural district games see *WI*, 19 March 1898, 16 April 1898, 26 Feb. 1899, 6 May 1899, 13 May 1899, 22 July 1899,

areas where public sources of entertainment were rare and reportedly over 1,000 spectators attended the St. Patrick's Day game between the Glasson Young Ireland and the Blary McBride club. Some of these clubs used a naming policy that had nationalist connotations with Daniel O'Connell, Sean McBride for his efforts in the Boer War, Wolfe Tone and the Young Ireland movement memorialised by these rural clubs. The use of nationalist icons by young men playing soccer would suggest that the game at this stage had not become politicised. This was also suggested in relation to cricket and the process whereby certain games became politicised was a post-1900 development. The post-1903 growth of cultural nationalism and the Irish-Ireland movement with its associated GAA development provided a football alternative for the young men of these districts. Coosan, Tubberclare and Glasson clubs affiliated to the GAA in 1905 and terminated the possibility of soccer becoming popular in rural Westmeath.

The relatively inactive period was followed in the early 1900s with a remarkable escalation in soccer activity in the town of Athlone. This was fuelled by the emergence of a new team the Athlone Junior team. At the end of October 1902 this club had played thirteen games and remained unbeaten.²⁰¹ In April 1903 this record had extended to thirty games with twenty-three wins, five draws and two losses recorded in which 109 goals were scored.²⁰² The club was financially stable and the popular support it received in Athlone was such that £9 5s. 6d. was contributed by the town's people at the end of the 1902 season. The club members attempted to prepare for their matches by developing fitness levels and included regular Tuesday night runs in their training schedule. It also promoted the game by making available 'at a nominal' sum weekly clubrooms to the Shamrocks team that was also formed at this time. The Ranelagh School Grounds was placed at the club's disposal for cup games and, Mr Bailie, the principal of the school, was appointed club President for the 1902-3 season.²⁰³ Inspired by the juniors' performances the original and successful Athlone team of the early 1890s also returned to competitive soccer in October 1902.²⁰⁴

²⁰¹ *WI*, 25 Oct. 1902. The club had won nine games, drawn four and in the process scored thirty goals.

²⁰² *WI*, 18 April 1903.

²⁰³ Lynch, *Athlone*, 33.

²⁰⁴ *WI*, 25 Oct. 1902.

Athlone at this stage had three civilian teams (the Shamrocks team was active from October 1902) and, with two military garrisons based in the town, soccer dominated as a participant and spectator sport.²⁰⁵ The 1902-03 season was particularly busy and featured a regular programme of soccer from October to April. The number of active teams in the district meant that double-header and triple-header Sunday programmes were organised. The Athlone Juniors played twice on the same day against a team from Kiltoom and a Coney Island selection in May 1902; in October, as part of a triple bill, the Shamrocks XI played the Athlone Junior team and an Artillery team in successive games and this was followed by a game that featured the re-formed Athlone Senior team against an Artillery selection. These events proved very attractive to the Athlone public and on this occasion 'Shortly after 1 o'clock spectators were to be seen, filing into the grounds and before the second match was completed the town had emptied itself of the majority of its inhabitants, leaving the streets almost deserted'.²⁰⁶ November featured two further double bills and December featured a triple-header, and the month concluded with a Leinster junior cup game between the Athlone Junior team and University College.²⁰⁷ At this stage as the *Westmeath Independent* reported

The grand old game of association football seemed to have taken complete sway in Athlone and both players and public have become almost entirely fascinated by it; this most manly sport has taken a firm root in the minds of the sports loving public of Athlone.²⁰⁸

The dominance at this time was such that the major public holidays on St Stephen's Day, St. Patrick's Day and Easter Monday at Athlone featured soccer games as the main source of entertainment. GAA organised games at this time had little impact in the town and a Westmeath championship football game in May 1904 drew derision from some. According to the *Westmeath Independent* 'there was undoubtedly a disposition on the part of very many to ridicule and make little of the Gaelic Game'.²⁰⁹ Soccer never attained the same popularity as a spectator sport or as a vehicle for participation in Mullingar. Football and hurling tournaments provided

²⁰⁵ *WI*, 11 Oct. 1902.

²⁰⁶ *WI*, 25 Oct. 1902.

²⁰⁷ *WI*, Nov. 1 1902, Nov. 8 1902, 6 Dec. 1902, 27 Dec. 1902.

²⁰⁸ *WI*, 11 Oct. 1902.

²⁰⁹ *WI*, 14 May 1904.

sporting spectacle from 1903 onwards. In April 1905, following a badly supported soccer game staged at the Showgrounds in Mullingar, the *Midland Reporter* claimed to have ‘certainly killed the imported game in the county Westmeath and cricket this summer is bound to follow its friend, Association, into the oblivion from which it should never have emerged’.²¹⁰

Social origins of soccer players

The purpose of this section is to carry out a detailed examination of the players who were involved in the game of soccer in the period 1900-1904 using the methodology outlined in the introduction. In total, seventy-five players out of a total of 105 listed were positively identified. This gives a sample of 71.42 per cent and is large enough to be representative of the group as a whole. The findings, as shown in Table 32, establish that urban soccer attracted participants particularly from social class C (66.66 per cent) with individuals from social class D also well represented. The absence of representatives from social class D in the rural districts is particularly noteworthy.²¹¹ Twenty-one individuals out of twenty-five who represented Glasson in soccer in the period 1900-1 were identified from the enumerators’ census forms. Landowners or tenant farmers dominated the group as fourteen were farmers’ sons and three were farmers. Three farm labourers and a tailor completed the group, which had an average age of 21.5 years.

In Athlone social classes Ci and Cii had the greatest representation. Ci included occupations such as a coach painter, victualler, plumber and carpenter whilst Cii was made up of clerks and shop assistants. In Mullingar the skilled tradesmen involved included a cycle repairer, a boot-maker, a tailor and a printer’s compositor. The Westmeath situation whereby the majority of soccer players (66.66 per cent) were from social class C is similar to Tranter’s sample from central Scotland and the findings of Ian Nannestad in Lincolnshire. In central Scotland, in the period 1880-83, 73.3 per cent of footballers were from social class C whilst the same group formed 60.66 per cent of the total in Lincolnshire.²¹²

²¹⁰ *MR*, 27 April 1905.

²¹¹ Social class D mainly consisted of farm labourers.

²¹² Tranter, *Occupational structure* 4, 1, 1987, 303. I. Nannestad, ‘From Sabbath breakers to respectable sportsmen: the development of football in Lincolnshire, 1855 to 1881’, Unpublished MA thesis, De Montfort University, Leicester, 2003, 131.

	Mullingar	Athlone	Rural	Total	Percentage		
Total sample	30	50	25	105	Urban Total	Rural Total	Total
Identified	18	36	21	75			
Bi		3		3	5.56		4
Bii		1		1	1.85		1.3
Biii			17	17		80.95	22.67
Ci	9	9	1	19	33.33	4.76	25.37
Cii	3	13		16	29.63		21.34
Ciii		2		2	3.7		2.66
D (rural)			3	3		14.29	4
D (urban)	6	8		14	25.93		18.66

Table 32: Social classes of Athlone and Mullingar based soccer players in 1900-1904.

The age of the Westmeath soccer player ranged from 15 to 34 and the average age of a Mullingar player at 21.88 was younger than the Athlone player at 23.22 years. The difference in average age reflects the fact that the Athlone sample includes a number of individuals who were active in the game since 1894. Soccer at this level was overwhelmingly the preserve of the young and single man as only two Athlone based individuals from the total sample were married. The relative youth of the players partly explains their conjugal status but also was a product of their economic circumstances. Marriage brought new responsibilities, family commitments and expenses, and the amount of disposable income available for investment in social and recreational activities became circumscribed. Remarkably, the average age of a Westmeath soccer player (22.6 years) is almost exactly the same as the average age of an Irish professional (22.7 years) discovered by Neal Garnham in his study.²¹³ The conjugal status of the players however was significantly different as 35 per cent of Garnham's samples were married. Payment for playing football for some provided a substantial supplement to the weekly wage or a notable increase on the average weekly wage if employed by a club full time. The economic circumstances of Belfast also facilitated the combination of marriage, family, work commitments and football. Comparatively low accommodation costs in Belfast and greater availability of

²¹³ Garnham, *Association football*, 92.

employment for female dependents there, meant real domestic incomes in Edwardian Belfast were comparatively higher than elsewhere.²¹⁴

The unskilled urban labourer, at 25.93 per cent was significantly represented in the Westmeath sample and the involvement of the unskilled labourer in soccer was far greater than his counterpart of central Scotland or in Lincolnshire where only 5.7 and 5.0 per cent were respectively involved.²¹⁵ The proportion is however smaller than that discovered by Garnham where 36.4 per cent were unskilled labourers. This difference illustrates the importance of the wage earned by the footballer in Belfast in maintaining the involvement in soccer.

More striking was the homogenous nature of the religious affiliation displayed by the group; all of those sampled were members of the Catholic Church. The total absence of Church of Ireland members from the sample is a measure of the changed circumstances of the Athlone club since the formative links between the sport and Ranelagh School personnel were severed. Members of the Church of Ireland were of a higher social status and found sporting fulfilment in the more elitist recreational activities such as lawn tennis and golf as shown in the previous chapter.

Conclusion

The failure of football to maintain its progress in the county after its initial success is partly due to the failure of the internal management structure and the refusal of clubs to accept the decisions made by the controlling authority. This is not surprising given the circumstances of the time. The ability to accept the authority of a controlling body required a political maturity that was yet to be reached. The survival of a county committee required the achievement of consensus. Clubs were required to sacrifice their individual interests for the overall benefit of the game within the county. Despite the existence of rules and a hierarchy of officials to enforce them, ultimately within the county, this consensus was not maintained. The two Mullingar clubs in particular refused to accept the committee's decisions and this resulted in the Athlone club abandoning football in favour of soccer and the disappearance of the Shamrock's club.

²¹⁴ Ibid, 96-7.

²¹⁵ Tranter, 'Organized sport', 303; Nannestad, 'Sabbath breakers', 131

Codification was one of the characteristics of the transformation of sport from the pre-modern to its modern manifestation. As a process it was a slowly evolving one and the achievement of uniformity of rule interpretation and acceptance was protracted. Men with minimum experience of involvement in competitive sport or whose previous experience was in recreational cricket were expected to compete in a game in which the codes showed considerable spatial variation.

In the interim, disputes on rules and regulations were common and retarded the development of the football game. Disputed scores and illegal tackles were important in damaging the development of the early GAA in Westmeath. Problems with rule interpretation proved particularly difficult for the T. P. O'Connor club in Athlone. The experience of the core group of this football club when they opted for soccer illustrates the importance of widely understood and established set of rules and regulations. The group made the transfer without difficulty and became one of the most successful clubs in Leinster in the early 1890s.

This chapter has illustrated the central importance of the social activities associated with the game. The average individual engaging with football at the local level was motivated by the desire to socialise and expand his recreational and leisure activities. Participation in football at this stage allowed young men to extend their social calendar into the winter months in the manner in which tennis or polo allowed the members of a different social class develop a summer social calendar. Political intrigue and struggles between the IRB and the constitutional nationalists for control at executive level was of little concern to the ordinary member of the GAA in Westmeath. Police reports always conscious of the political agenda reported on the 1892 clubs that they were entirely non-political and were composed 'chiefly of shop assistants who keep up the clubs for recreation purposes on Sunday'. In Athlone, the club was kept up 'for the pastime and not as a political club'.²¹⁶

The withdrawal of the T. P. O'Connor club from GAA activities and the decision of the members to concentrate on soccer transformed the socio-economic constituency of

²¹⁶ CBS, 1/22594; 6247/S.

that sport in Athlone and changed its competitive ethos. The development of the game was facilitated by the presence of the army garrison in the town. Army teams provided quality opposition, knowledge of the skills and tactics of the game and information on the rules of play that had become standardised over time. In contrast the rules that governed football were evolving and were subject to various local interpretation.

The most important factor responsible for a strong soccer culture in Athlone however was that a small core of middle class business men who were members of some of the town's leading commercial families transferred their allegiance to soccer and maintained their support for the game into the early 1900s. This type of class support for either football code was absent in Mullingar as many of those initially involved in the GAA were migrants to the town and had moved elsewhere by 1900. Michael Mullen in his explanation of what he terms the 'bifurcation of Irish sport' suggested that class leadership in Irish sport fell to the Catholic petty bourgeois, 'a stratum in the 1880s unimpressed by British sport and committed to its opposition'.²¹⁷ This was not how Athlone developed its sporting culture. It was the members of this class that were responsible for the strength of Athlone's soccer.

The introduction of rugby presents elements of the classic British model of sports diffusion. Headmasters Bailie and Foster were public school graduates who attended Trinity College and on graduation introduced rugby to their schools at Ranelagh and Farra respectively following their appointment as headmasters. However, further diffusion failed to happen.

²¹⁷ Michael Mullen, 'The devolution of the Irish economy in the nineteenth century and the bifurcation of Irish sport', in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 13, 2, 1996, 43.

Chapter 6: Cultural ferment and the re-emergence of the GAA, 1900-1905

Introduction

The period 1900-05 saw the re-emergence of the GAA on an institutional basis within the county as part of a developing political and cultural nationalism. This chapter will examine how this cultural movement affected sport and in particular will examine the re-emergence of the GAA and the decline of cricket. Hurling was introduced to the county, football under GAA rules was revived and these developments and their impact on recreational habits will be examined. It will be shown that the formation of football and hurling clubs challenged the role of cricket in providing a recreational outlet for the labouring classes of the county. The socio-occupational characteristics of the new group of hurling and football players will be examined.

The last years of the 1890s saw a national revival of political nationalism, associated with the 1798 centenary celebrations, the Boer War, the extension of elected local government throughout Ireland, a franchise extension and the emergence of the United Irish League (UIL). The United Irish League was designed to reconcile the various parliamentary factions by uniting them around a new programme of agrarian agitation, political reform and home rule.¹ The decade was, 'despite a superficial appearance of passivity a period of intensive political organisation'.² In the years between 1890-1910, according to Garvin, Irish parliamentary forces were outflanked by societies often unsympathetic to representative politics. The break-up of the Irish National League that followed the Parnell downfall permitted organisations to emerge that captured youthful imaginations. Trade unions and cultural nationalist movements such as the Gaelic League and a revived GAA were the beneficiaries of this process.

These political and cultural organisations advocated conflicting national ideals. Nationalist critiques of UIL agrarianism were common. In 1900-05 the most prominent voices of critique came from the proprietors of two national weekly newspapers, the *United Irishman* and *The Leader*. In the former, Arthur Griffith promoted separatism in terms of Parnellism and artisan traditions of self-help; in the latter D.P. Moran harnessed cultural nationalism to an aggressive form of nationalism

¹ Tom Garvin, *The evolution of Irish nationalist politics*, Dublin, 1991, 91-2.

² Patrick Maume, *The long gestation: Irish nationalist life, 1891-1918*, Dublin, 1999, 27.

aimed at young Catholic professionals who were ‘more numerous and confident and less deferential than their predecessors’.³ These two Catholic journalists, who reacted against the perceived stagnation of national life, became the chief spokesmen for a young Catholic intelligentsia. They translated the evolutionary ideas of the cultural revivalists into economic, social and political programmes for the regeneration of Ireland as a modern urban civilisation.⁴

Griffith’s newspaper articles were multi-themed, but for the purposes of this study, his attitude to sporting activities is of interest.⁵ Griffith perceived soccer and other sports identified as foreign as the snobbish pretensions of middle-class West Britons or as the commercial pastimes of degraded English lower classes. Participation in these, he argued, endangered national virtues through socialisation with anti-national elements. GAA amateurism, in contrast, was truly patriotic, Griffith argued, but his belief in centralism led him to claim that the GAA was ruined by a parliamentary inspired devolution of authority, from executive to county committees.⁶

D. P. Moran who began publication of his weekly *The Leader* in September 1900 was ‘the major figure of the politico-cultural revival’.⁷ He was the chief architect of the expansion of the language campaign into a general Irish Ireland movement that allied the Catholic educated classes with reformist and neo-traditionalist clergy against Protestant hegemony in Ireland and paved the way for the creation of an essentially Gaelic Catholic identity.⁸ He denounced British mass-culture as corrupting and degenerate, ridiculed snobberies and West Britonism among the Catholic middle-classes, criticised the Irish Party as hypocritical and ineffective and ‘called for self-reliance and a producerist ethos driven by pride in Irish distinctiveness’.⁹ In Moran’s view, Catholicism underpinned Irish distinctiveness.

³ Maume, *Long gestation*, 48.

⁴ John Hutchinson, *The dynamics of cultural nationalism: the Gaelic revival and the creation of the Irish nation state*, London, 1987, 168.

⁵ Maume, *Long gestation*, 48-59.

⁶ *Ibid*, 53-5.

⁷ Hutchinson, *Dynamics*, 173.

⁸ *Ibid*, 174.

⁹ Maume, *Long gestation*, 59

The ideas of Griffith and Moran had considerable impact on the Gaelic League and it became an umbrella organisation for a range of interest groups and underwent a dramatic expansion in branches and numbers between 1900-06.¹⁰ The organisation was founded in 1893 as a non-political, non-sectarian organisation dedicated to the preservation and revival of the Irish language and the 'celebration of, and if possible the resuscitation of, traditional dress, dances and customs'.¹¹ The rapid growth experienced by the League in the early years of the new century transformed the movement and it became more Catholic, less Dublin oriented and more clericalist.¹²

Cultural nationalism in Westmeath

National trends were reflected in Westmeath with increased political activism reflected in the rapid growth of the United Irish League.¹³ Cultural nationalism was the ideological force that impacted most significantly on social life in Westmeath between 1900 and 1906. Gaelic League branches in Westmeath were first established in the early 1900s. The Mullingar branch was founded at a public meeting, 'marked by an enthusiasm of a kind never before witnessed in Mullingar', on 24 February 1901.¹⁴ Members of the town's business community, clerks and shop assistants dominated a meeting chaired by the parish administrator, Rev. E. O'Reilly who delivered the keynote address.

The initial enthusiasm was short lived and in the two years that followed the organisation had little impact.¹⁵ However, an editorial in the *Westmeath Examiner* in April 1903 suggested that circumstances were about to change, as there was 'arising in Mullingar a strong wave of public opinion in favour of the revival of the Gaelic tongue and the Gaelic tradition'.¹⁶ Crucially, the importance of extending the programme of the Gaelic League beyond the language, literature and music instructional classes was signalled. The aims of the organisation would be best achieved, it was argued, by developing 'the social side of the Irish character'. The

¹⁰ Hutchinson, *Dynamics*, 178.

¹¹ Tom Garvin, *Nationalist revolutionaries of Ireland, 1858-1928*, Oxford, 1987, 79.

¹² Ibid, 85.

¹³ John Wylie, 'Laurence Ginnell, 1852-1923; Westmeath's radical agrarian', unpublished M.A. thesis, NUI, Maynooth, 1999, 23, 76.

¹⁴ *WE*, 2 March 1901.

¹⁵ *WE*, 4 April 1903.

¹⁶ *WE*, 18 April 1903.

Gaelic revival had been most successful ‘in areas where pleasant social functions, reunions, gatherings of students, Irish concerts, Irish dances, Gaelic Clubs’, were combined with the language classes.¹⁷ This editorial was inspired by the first public performance of the Mullingar Brass and Reed Band at which support for the ideals of the Irish-Ireland movement came from the commanding officer of the 1st Battalion of the Connaught Rangers. Colonel Moore addressed the bandsmen and assembled audience and suggested that if they

Would be really Irish, and have their art really Irish, they would have to adopt the whole Gaelic tradition, speak the Irish tongue, read Irish books, and learn Irish songs, instead of using English musical or literary importations ...if the bandsmen wanted to be really Irish, they must quit using the language of the foreigner and speak and express their ideas and feelings in that old tongue in which are enshrined the thoughts and traditions of the Gael.¹⁸

A public meeting was then held to consider what steps could be taken to help the Gaelic movement in town and the arguments of Colonel Moore were expanded to include the notion of boycotting certain events. Moore suggested that they should encourage Irish music, Irish songs at concerts, and ‘absent themselves from such concerts as would not include Irish songs’.¹⁹

This meeting was followed by the third, more inclusive, attempt to launch the Gaelic League in Mullingar, in that women were invited to join. In a matter of weeks, twenty girls and thirty boys were regularly attending language classes. A second branch catering for the national teachers of the town was also established.²⁰ A branch was established in Athlone in October 1902.²¹ In the north Westmeath town of Castlepollard, Irish language classes were organised in the district from December 1903. Peter Nea, a native of the district and a member of the McHale Branch of the Gaelic League in Dublin was influential in this area.²² A branch of the Gaelic League was established in the town in November 1904. The Gaelic League was particularly strong in the Milltown parish, located six miles to the west of Mullingar, where the branch secretary, the national teacher Mr John Casey, a native speaker from Kerry

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *WE*, 18 April 1903.

¹⁹ *WE*, 25 April 1903.

²⁰ *WE*, 2 May, 9 May, 16 May 1903.

²¹ *WI*, 24 Oct. 1902.

²² *MR*, 17 Dec. 1903, 7 Jan. 1904.

was particularly active. Conscious of the need to diversify, the Milltown Gaelic League branch members decided to enhance their language classes by including Irish songs and dances in each class 'so that business and enjoyment go hand in hand'. Approval of this diversification was not total. The members were also cautioned that a Gaelic League branch was 'a school for the education of the people on Irish-Ireland lines and is not to be considered a dancing hall or a mere place of amusement'.²³

The desire for a broader based programme of activities introduced a new element of entertainment to Westmeath. These were the *aeridheachta*, open-air festivals of Irish singing, recitation, dancing and music, and they formed a very important element of the social landscape of the county during the summer months of 1904-05 and played a crucial role in the promotion of a cultural nationalist agenda. The Milltown branch of the Gaelic League pioneered the local prototype of this event. This was held on Sunday 28 June 1903 and was attended by 'roughly speaking 4,000 persons of all classes, religions, professions and trades'.²⁴ The programme featured Irish traditional singing and recitations, competitions and displays of Irish dancing, piping and instrumental music performances. The greatest *aeridheacht* was held in Kinnegad on July 2 1905 'for the glory of God and the honour of Ireland'. The event was organised by the local branch of the Gaelic League with profits generated directed to the funds for the building of the new Catholic Church in Kinnegad.²⁵ The positive relationships between the Catholic Church and the GAA at this time is clear from the ways in which Catholic Church personnel also used the popularity of football tournaments as fund raising ventures for their building programmes. Tournaments were organised in Rathwire and Clonard in November 1904 and March 1905 to raise funds for the repair of the local churches.²⁶

Cultural nationalism and sport

The development of cultural nationalism had a significant impact on the development of sport within the county. Participation in sport became a vehicle for the expression of national identity and the promotion of what were considered to be Irish sports was integral to the creation of an Irish-Ireland. Hurling in particular found favour with

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ *WE*, 4 July 1903.

²⁵ *WE*, 8 July 1905.

²⁶ *WE*, 3 Nov. 1904; *MR*, 16 March 1905.

Gaelic League activists for whom the myth of its pre-historic origins proved particularly attractive. The corollary also pertained. Games perceived as British were challenged and their supporters were stigmatised as West-Britons, a badge of identity given the ethos and culture of the day, designed to undermine support for these games. The sport of cricket as the most popular sport in the county became a specific target of attack and vilification. The promotion of the concept of Irish-Ireland locally and the targeting of West Britonism by the *Midland Reporter* newspaper especially, and to a lesser extent by the *Westmeath Independent* and the *Westmeath Examiner*, was extremely important in creating the climate that undermined support for cricket and sports tainted with an anti-national identity.

However it was not simply participation in the sport that concerned the cultural nationalists. There was also a reaction against the cultural trappings and fraternisation that accompanied cricket and soccer. Concern about the impact on 'national virtue' that socialisation with what were considered to be anti-national elements was articulated. Activities and events inherent to soccer and cricket were condemned as promoting notions of servility, subjection and allegiance to the alien power in Ireland.²⁷ The Gaelic games columnist of the *Westmeath Independent* was in no doubt about the negative impact such associations would have on the youth of Athlone

We do not find fault with soccer and rugby as such. They may be more scientific than Gaelic or they may not. That is not our contention now but every Nationalist must object to the surroundings in which they are played. Their atmosphere is one thing which tends to degrade and anglicise the Irish mind. We have soldiers of all sorts and shapes participating in them. At the big matches we have the blaze of the military band, the 'God-Save-the-King element' and all the snobocracy baring their heads in acknowledgement of their own degradation. Those are the elements we object to. We do not like to see our fine Irish youths making acquaintance of the British recruiting sergeant and cultivating the acquaintances of England's soldiers... We only want to emphasise that the Irish games are for the Irish, the former ones for the foreigner and that it is only by depending on ourselves in the regions of sport as well as in everything else we can become really Irish. Certainly we must keep our young men from coming in contact with the barrack-room and by having them on the Gaelic field, there will be little inducement held out to them to go there.²⁸

²⁷ Neal Garnham, 'Football and national identity in pre-Great War Ireland', in *Irish Economic and Social History*, xxviii, 2001, 19.

²⁸ *WI*, 28 March 1905.

A serious assault on cricket's credibility by the *The Midland Reporter* was continued throughout 1904 and 1905. The newspaper was in the vanguard of promoting Irish Ireland and targeting the West Briton. The playing of cricket and West Britonism were equated. The cricket-playing West Briton was attacked and the newspaper developed a speciality in the baiting and taunting of Westmeath cricketers. They were deliberately targeted and tainted with the brush of anti-Irishness. Areas where cricket was popular were pilloried for their lack of national fervour. 'The muddled oafs and flannelled fools' from the district of Cloughan were a particular target because of the 'strong love for the game of the Saxon'.²⁹ Cloughan, and other cricket playing districts, was identified as an area that was hopeless from the national point of view. This was all that could be expected from

any body of young men who call themselves Irishmen, when they are continually truckling to the *seoinins* and their importations. Cloughan and Kilbride, Stoneyford and the Mountain Parish are simply useless so far as Ireland is concerned. The great object of the young men in these places is to change the townlands, and make them assume the appearance of districts in the England that they love.³⁰

In June 1905, when the 'West Britons' of Mullingar arranged a cricket match against a Dublin team, they had 'to requisition the Cloughan worthies to show off their skill with the bat and ball. Cloughan is a disgrace to the county of Westmeath, and all the young nationalists to whom I have been speaking had nothing but words of contempt for these degenerates'.³¹

Clubs such as Kilbeggan, Multyfarnham and Rathconrath that had not affiliated to the GAA were identified as the 'black sheep' of the county 'stuck in the mire' without any 'ambition for honours' and 'absolutely no use to either themselves or the GAA'.³² The news that the men of Kiltoom village had decided to affiliate a hurling team was greeted with the news that a funeral would be held 'over what is left of the remains of cricket'. The interment was to be carried out at Moyne 'by the few sole survivors of the old Saxon cricket that exist there'.³³ There was also a class response

²⁹ *MR*, 24 July 1904.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *MR*, 15 June 1905.

³² *MR*, 25 March 1905.

³³ *MR*, 16 Feb. 1905.

to these attacks. The elite that patronised many sports are portrayed as West Britons. These individuals in some cases were able to withdraw into 'private sports' such as polo, whilst the lower classes turned to the GAA to satisfy their recreational needs.

Another tactic adopted was to ridicule the standard of play that was found 'in the few benighted districts in the country, where alleged cricket clubs' existed. In these clubs, according to the *Midland Herald*, not one of them knew how to play the game properly.

One single cricketer from England would beat the massed teams of the county, and would have by long odds, a higher score to their credit, than the whole crowd.... Poor creatures, they are more to be pitied than blamed. They are incapable of thinking for themselves, and like a moth round a candle, they hanker after English ideas, although their limited intelligence does not permit them to imitate.

The local nationalist press also used cartoons to lampoon the county's cricketers and followers of targeted British sports. The *Midland Reporter* specialised in this form of attack but the *Westmeath Independent* also used the occasional cartoon. The example in Figure 21 is a particularly effective example of the type used. In this example the caricatured *seoinin* implores the woodman to spare the tree that represented the chief elements of West British culture accompanied by a note of approval that 'the uprise of Westmeath in regard to Hurling, Gaelic Football and the holding of Aerideachta, etc., had been something phenomenal and is full of promise for the future'.

In the Athlone district, where soccer was more popular, arguments on the respective skill levels on the two most popular football codes were more common and these were extended to give them a political application. According to the *Westmeath Independent*, those who categorised Gaelic games as rough and savage activities devoid of skill, tact, manliness and fair play were using similar arguments to those used by Unionist opponents of Home Rule. These characteristics of the sport were an indication of an inability to manage affairs 'in matters so trivial as sports and games' and undermined any claim to be able to do so in 'serious matters'.

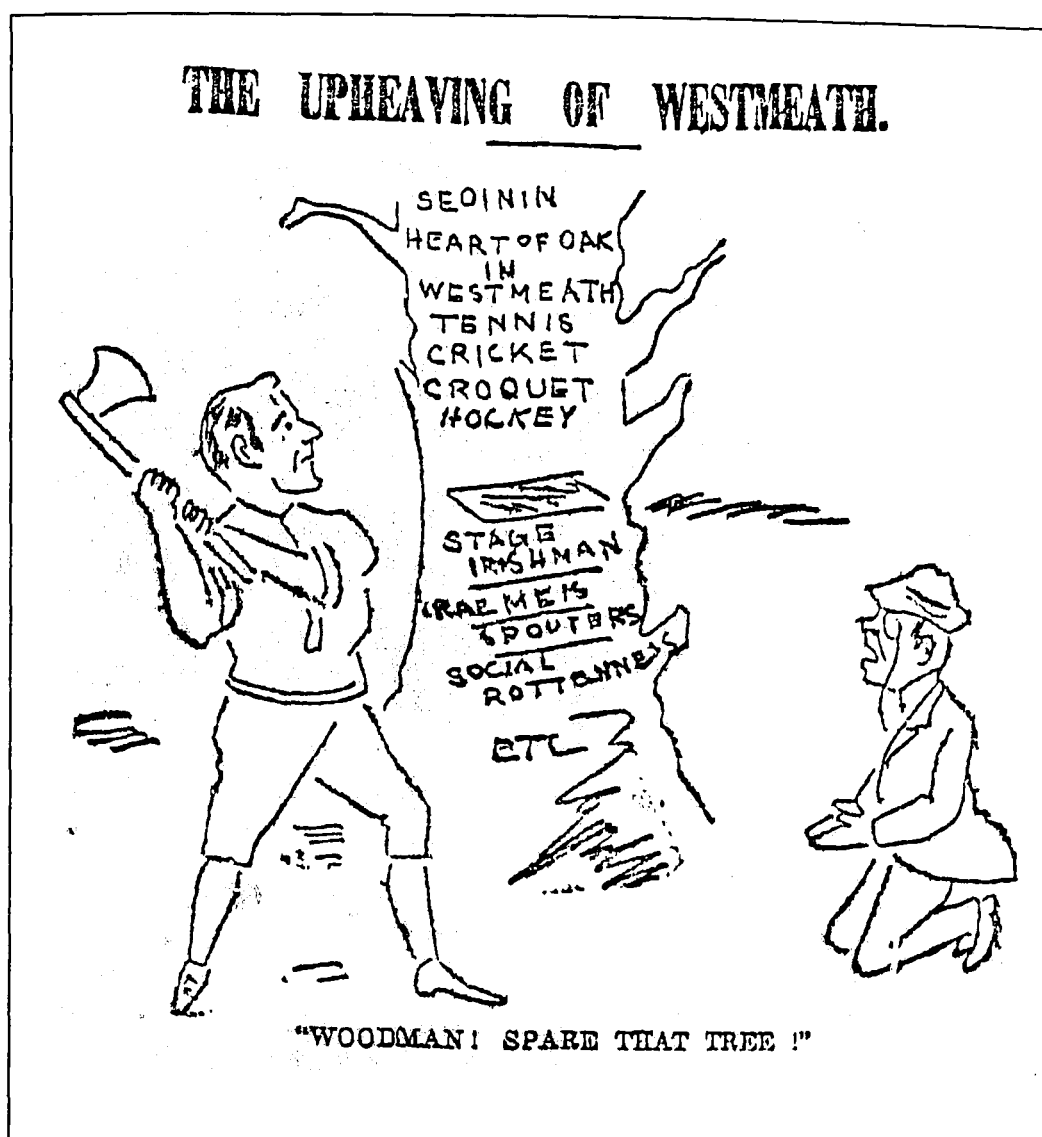


Figure 21: Lampooning of West Britonism by means of cartoon.

The same article, in a manner similar to Cusack twenty years earlier, emphasised the necessity for an Irish organisation to manage sport for the Irish people. According to the writer, nationalism and support for British games were incompatible, for 'a soccerite, a rugbyite, is scarcely a Home Ruler'.³⁴

Introduction of hurling

In Mullingar, the temperance club was part of the broad cultural nationalist movement. St Mary's Temperance Club, established in 1896, was one of the most active clubs in Mullingar and was popular with many of the young male lower-middle class Catholics and artisans of the town. This was an ultra-Catholic organisation that required public proclamation of adherence to the faith and the temperance cause. The

³⁴ *WI*, 13 Feb. 1904.

club members promised to abstain from alcoholic liquor for five years, attend the bi-monthly meetings of the club and receive communion wearing the society's ribbon and medal on the first Sunday of each month.³⁵ Clubs such as these that combined religious observance and temperance were required to provide entertainment if they were to compete with the conviviality of the public house. These activities were used also to promote the temperance agenda. Temperance society members in Mullingar had access to reading rooms, snooker tables, had the opportunity to participate in amateur theatricals and join the Brass and Reed Band. They were also provided with the opportunity to compete in sporting pastimes in both an indoor and outdoor setting.

Membership overlap between the Mullingar branch of the Gaelic League and the Temperance Club and considerable coalescence of ideals was a characteristic of the time. The promotion of temperance was included within the Gaelic League ambit whilst the St Mary's Temperance Club contributed to the development of nationalism by the staging of plays with a nationalistic theme. These shared aspirations were responsible for the formation of the first hurling club in the county, when the St Mary's Hurling Club, was founded on 27 February 1902 with a claimed membership of forty. The members held their first practice match on 16 March 1902.³⁶ In January 1903, influenced by the contemporary cultural ethos, a more positive Irish identity was formulated when the name of the club was changed to the Mullingar Shamrocks club. The formation of a hurling club within the organisation solidified the status of the members of the temperance club as cultural nationalists and in their choice of hurling they adopted a game that was ideal for establishing nationalist credentials.

Hurling was a stick and ball game for which its supporters claimed a pedigree that extended back to pre-historic times. This mythology established a status for hurling as the most Irish of games and made it an ideal vehicle for promotion by Gaelic League activists. The first recorded mention of the game dates it to a legendary battle fought at Moytura, county Galway in 1272 BC. It supposedly played a central part in the pre-historic Tailteann games and featured in the legends of Cuchulainn who earned his name and reputation through his hurling exploits. In the early modern period, versions

³⁵ *WE*, 8 Oct. 1896.

³⁶ *WE*, 8 March 1902; 22 March 1902.

of the game were so popular that the authorities made some attempt to control it.³⁷ The mythological referencing of hurling to pre-history has been used as evidence for the existence of the game 'as a distinctively Irish pastime for at least 2,000 years'.³⁸ The reality, as Comerford has pointed out, is that stick and ball games were found in many ancient and later cultures and that a number of modern codified forms have evolved including cricket, hockey, shinty and hurling to mention only team sports.³⁹

By the eighteenth century two regional versions of the game existed in Ireland. A winter version of the game was played in the northern half of the country similar to modern hockey in that the ball could not be handled and was played with a narrow wooden stick. A summer version was played in the south of Ireland. It was a handling and carrying game played with a soft, animal-hair ball. This game enjoyed gentry patronage and was a spectator and gambling sport associated with fairs and other public gatherings.⁴⁰ By the mid-nineteenth century hurling had declined so sharply that it survived only in the hinterland of Cork city, in south-east Galway and in a district north of Wexford town.⁴¹

There are some brief references to the existence of the game in areas in Westmeath. The poetry of Laurence Whyte provides circumstantial evidence that hurling was played in the Ballymore district in the early eighteenth century. His poem *The Parting Cup* concerns itself with the vicissitudes of a substantial Westmeath tenant farmer. The sporting prowess of the family was celebrated in the verses as one that 'seldom did refuse a summons, to play at football or at Commons'.⁴² A series of articles published in the *Westmeath Independent* in the 1930s featured the reminiscences of Michael Kilkelly of Athlone. He recalled matches that were played in the Big Meadows in the 1860s and some of the outstanding players that featured. In these games hurleys were not made from ash but 'crabtree, blackthorn, whitethorn, and

³⁷ Both the Statutes of Kilkenny (1367) and the Statutes of Galway (1537) made references to versions of hurling that were restrictive in intention. The Galway statutes for instance ordered that 'at no time to engage in the hurling of the little ball with hockey sticks or staves, or use the handball for playing outside the walls but only to play with the great football ...'.

³⁸ de Burca, *G.A.A.*, 1.

³⁹ Comerford, *Inventing*, 215.

⁴⁰ Kevin Whelan, 'The geography of hurling' in *History Ireland*, spring 1993, 27.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 28.

⁴² Patrick Fagan, *A Georgian Celebration: Irish poets of the eighteenth century*, Dublin, 1989, 34-6.

kinds cut from hedges' were used.⁴³ The game was more difficult to organise and promote than football, as it required a far greater range of skills and specialist equipment for each player. It required the knowledge and experience of a practitioner of the game from one of the strong hurling counties of southern Ireland to introduce the game to non-hurling territory such as Westmeath.

The Temperance Club provided the social network about which the first hurling club was established in Mullingar but there were other significant influences involved. The catalyst was provided by the arrival in Mullingar of some individuals familiar with the game and according to one source was particularly due 'to the teachings of a Limerick player who formerly belonged to the Croom team in that county'.⁴⁴ Employment related networks were also important. At least six of the members were employees of the family firm of Shaws, where not alone did they share employment but inhabited the same residence.

Hurling was next established in Castlepollard where five cricket clubs were active in the period 1899-1902. Similar circumstances to Mullingar were responsible for the introduction of the game to the town. This time the pioneer was Patrick Corcoran an employee of Hennessy's grocery store. Corcoran was a native of Tipperary and was a 'warm exponent of all old Gaelic games and pastimes, especially hurling at which he was adept'.⁴⁵ He had been four years resident in Castlepollard in November 1903 when the Castlepollard Hurling Club was established.⁴⁶ Over twenty players regularly practiced at this time with the group dominated by 'commercial men' who were employed in Hennessy's and Gibney's. The Castlepollard Cricket Club also acted as a nucleus for the new club as a number of its members reportedly enrolled shortly after its establishment.⁴⁷

Once introduced to north Westmeath contagious diffusion was responsible for the spread of hurling in other districts close to Castlepollard. The formation of Ringtown, Delvin, Simonstown Gaels and the Kiltoom Cruickilawee Rovers hurling clubs soon

⁴³ *WI*, 16 Aug. 1932.

⁴⁴ *WI*, 20 June 1903.

⁴⁵ *MR*, 20 October 1904.

⁴⁶ *MR*, 3 Dec. 1903.

⁴⁷ *MR*, 17 Dec. 1903.

followed. With the exception of Delvin, Patrick Nea was influential in the formation of these clubs. He combined enthusiasm for the ideals of the Gaelic League with the promotion of hurling. According to the *Midland Reporter* he was the 'pioneer of everything Gaelic in this part of Westmeath'. He was 'accountable for starting the Sarsfields, the Myles O'Reilly's, and then came the Cruickilawee, and last, but not least, the Simonstown Hurling Club'.⁴⁸

The cricket clubs of north Westmeath formed an important source for practitioners of the newly introduced stick and ball game. Cricket clubs themselves didn't take on the game but provided a source for recruits who wished to cross over to the GAA fields given the cultural climate of the time. The Ringtown hurling club was founded in February 1904 and shared a direct lineage with the area's cricket club. It benefited from the patronage of landowner Denis Smyth J. P. who had acted as captain and main patron of the cricket club for many years. Smyth always placed the 'black field' at the disposal of the hurling club for practice and games.⁴⁹ The village of Kiltoom was located close to Castlepollard and was the estate village for the labourers of the demesne of the Earl of Longford. The Cruickilawee Rovers club was centred on the village and was formed from the members of the village's cricket club in March 1905.⁵⁰ The Castlepollard and Delvin hurling clubs 'were old friends since the days of cricket in Westmeath and a similar claim was made for the Simonstown Gaels Club when it affiliated'.⁵¹ The importance of the Gaelic League in introducing hurling in areas wasn't unique to Westmeath. After 1900 a series of GAA clubs were affiliated in Dublin that had direct links with the organisation. Most of these clubs chose names that related to Ireland's mythological past rather than opting for names that celebrated either constitutional or physical force nationalism. Teachers, clerks and civil servants were attracted to the Dublin GAA having been exposed to nationalism through the Gaelic League.⁵² A similar phenomenon has been documented in Derry.⁵³

⁴⁸ *MR*, 15 June 1905.

⁴⁹ *MR*, 3 March 1904.

⁵⁰ *MR*, 16 March 1905.

⁵¹ *MR*, 9 Feb. 1905, 12 May 1905, 15 June 1905.

⁵² David Gorry, 'The Gaelic Athletic Association in Dublin, 1884-2000: a geographical analysis', unpublished M.Litt. thesis, U.C.D., 2001, 97-98.

⁵³ Eoghan Corry, *Oakboys: Derry's football dream comes true*, Dublin, 1993, 57.

Hurling thus used an existing network of social, territorial and work-related loyalties and in the process created a new recreational and cultural identity. Familiarity with a stick and ball game, the presence of an individual with knowledge of the skills of the game in the district, a pre-existing social or work network and the influence of a Gaelic League activist were the important factors in the promotion of the game. The Irish-Ireland movement as mediated by Gaelic League activists provided the catalyst that initiated the process. The distribution of hurling and football playing districts is illustrated in Figure 22.

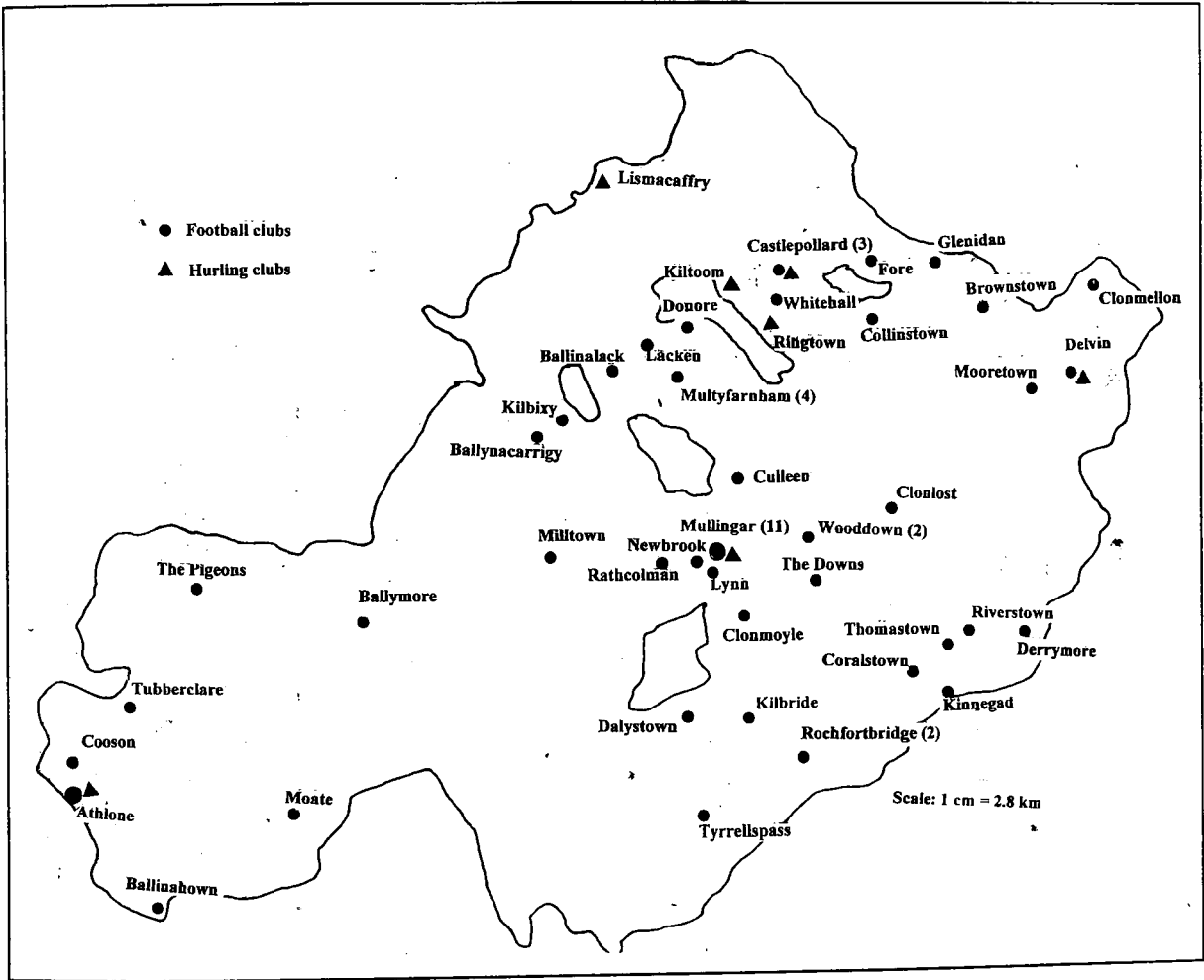


Figure 22: Hurling and football playing districts in Westmeath, 1900-05.

Revival of football

The revival of football occurred in a number of stages. Initially, groups of men came together to play football games on an *ad hoc* basis. This was followed by the organisation of football tournaments and eventually the GAA was formally instituted in the county with the formation of the local county committee. Following the post 1894 decline of the GAA in the county, occasional football games were organised and it was one of the combinations involved in this informal football activity that formed

the vanguard of the movement to establish the institutional GAA in the county. Towards the end of 1899 attempts were made to revive football in Mullingar with the initiative taken by the members of the Mount Street Cricket Club. The members of this club played football as a means of maintaining a recreational activity and social network over the winter months. Having put their bats aside for the winter 'in order to keep their limbs in practice' they turned their attention to their favoured winter football game. The editor of the *Westmeath Examiner* supported the initiative of the Mount Street men but also suggested that football was 'a game more in keeping with Irish character than cricket which is positively English'. Football was identified as the national game. In a *Westmeath Examiner* article that strongly echoed the famous letter of Dr. Croke of December 1884⁵⁴ it was argued that

If latter day Irish young men would try to preserve these games they would be doing a wonderful service to their country. For next to language the distinctive games of a people are the purest indication of their nationality. Therefore it is not out of place to ask the young men of the present day of this county to do everything in their power to preserve the national games, and to foster them, and neither is it out of place to ask grown men to lend in every way their sympathy and support to such an ideal, in order that these pastimes may have a counteracting effect to the Anglicising inroads that have been made, and the influences that have been at work to Anglicise our people, in whose minds English ideas have almost displaced those in the old fashion which were the pride and glory of our forefathers, and the proud characteristics of a race which though conquered could never be vanquished.⁵⁵

Despite the availability of a modern enclosed venue, team games in Mullingar at this time were poorly developed. A letter published in the *Westmeath Examiner* in December 1902 suggested that the town was 'the most backward in the Emerald Isle' and games such as 'cricket, football, hurling, handball, hockey and many others which afford ample recreation to one and all' were 'conspicuous by their absence'.⁵⁶ The same edition of the newspaper carried the news that the Mount Street football team had been reorganised for the new season and were ready to receive challenges from all country teams. At a meeting held at the Market House on Sunday, December 14th the club was re-constituted and became the Young Ireland club. The name change is indicative of the change in perception that had taken place in a few years and further

⁵⁴ *United Ireland*, 27 Dec. 1884. This letter was written by Dr. Croke, the Archbishop of Cashel in acceptance of the invitation of Michael Cusack to become patron of the new association, the GAA.

⁵⁵ *WE*, 28 Oct. 1899.

⁵⁶ *WE*, 6 Dec. 1902.

evidence of the change is contained in the statement, made by the Mullingar Young Ireland club that called for the establishment of a county committee. The statement concluded by noting that 'it would indeed be a great thing if the county clubs would put more dash and spirit into the movement now on hand, and let other counties see that Westmeath, if but slowly is surely trying not to be behind time in the Gaelic revival'.⁵⁷ Nothing developed from this call. Friendly and tournament games were played in the absence of a county committee structure.

The promotion of football received a boost in April 1903 when the Brass and Reed Band sponsored a tournament in Mullingar. Seven entries were received for the competition and Rochfortbridge Warriors and Wooddown Rackers entered from outside the Mullingar area. Based on the entries, Mullingar Shamrocks, Cullion Celtics, Railway Stars, Newbrook Wanderers and Independent Wanderers as well as the Young Ireland team played football at some level at this time in Mullingar.⁵⁸ The final, won by the Newbrook Wanderers team, played on Sunday 28 June attracted a large crowd to the Horse Show grounds despite the counter attraction of the 'great concert and competitions at Milltown'.⁵⁹ Football clubs were evolving but the practise of interchange between practitioners of the two main football codes continued. The successful Wanderers team included many members of the St. Patrick's association football club. Of the thirteen members of the St. Patrick's soccer club represented at the funeral of Joseph Garry, eight had played in the football final for Newbrook Wanderers.⁶⁰ The successful team included James Reynolds, the captain of the St. Patrick's F.C. and H. Stenson, its vice-captain.⁶¹

Inspired by the success of the summer competition, the Young Ireland club in October 1903 announced plans for the holding of a monster Gaelic tournament, 'in order to promote our Gaelic pastimes in the county Westmeath and place it on a proper footing with its neighbouring counties'.⁶² An exclusion rule applied to this tournament as all soldiers, sailors or association players were debarred from taking part. The inclusion

⁵⁷ *WE*, 17 Jan. 1903.

⁵⁸ The Young Ireland team affiliated to the national body and were ineligible for this competition.

⁵⁹ *WE*, 4 July 1903.

⁶⁰ Joseph Garry was the President of the Young Ireland football club and was accidentally killed in a rail accident in October 1903.

⁶¹ *WE*, 3 Oct. 1903.

⁶² *WE*, 31 Oct. 1903

of this rule was a reflection of developments at national level within the GAA but may also be an attempt to force the members of the St. Patrick's Club to affiliate to the GAA. The third tournament, organised in 1904, provides a clear indication of the growing popularity of football and the perceived commercial possibilities of this growth as it marked a commercial involvement in the promotion of the game coupled with an early example of brand-imaging in association with a GAA event. Mr. G. H. Goodwin the district manager of the Irish Provident Assurance Company provided a 'beautiful cup' for competition between the county champion football clubs of his district.⁶³

In the southern section of the county similar developments were taking place. Football was played in the Athlone area for the first time in almost a decade in February 1902 when an Athlone team that included a number of members of the Athlone soccer team challenged a team from Athleague, county Roscommon.⁶⁴ Shortly afterwards an attempt was made to start a hurling team in Athlone.⁶⁵ J. J. Walsh inspired this move. He explained that while numerous games were played in Ireland 'with few, if any exception, they were styled West British'. The formation of a hurling club was 'best calculated to properly meet the crush of West British games and amusements'.⁶⁶ The club played at least one friendly game against the local football club.⁶⁷ Walsh's untimely death in early 1903 was to delay the development of a hurling club in the town until late 1904. The popularity of soccer in Athlone at this time has been documented in the previous chapter with a number of new clubs established and older institutions revived.⁶⁸

The importance of football and hurling to the nationalist cause is reflected in the naming policy of the newly established clubs. It is also indicative of the extent to which football and hurling had now become politicised in Westmeath. The GAA clubs adopted a policy that established their position in the Irish-Ireland community and the members adopted names that embraced the local and the national. The first

⁶³ The area covered Westmeath, Galway, Roscommon, Cavan, Longford, Leitrim, part of King's county and Meath.

⁶⁴ *WI*, 1 March 1902.

⁶⁵ *WI*, 12 April 1902.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *WI*, 10 May 1902.

⁶⁸ *WI*, 11 Oct. 1902, *WI*, 18 Oct., 1902; 25 Oct., 1902.

part of the name established a territorial link with the parish, urban area or town-land. This was accompanied by an appendage that embraced the political and historical or established a link to Catholicism by including the name of a national or locally celebrated saint or church figure and is illustrated in Appendix 11. The names were drawn from nationalist history with contemporary political figures ignored with the exception of O'Growney who was commemorated by the Castlepollard football club.⁶⁹ Catholic identity was emphasised by the choice of St Patrick, St Ciaran and St Fintan by the Derrymore, Athlone and Lismacaffry clubs respectively. Clubs constructed an identity that linked their members as sportsmen to the nationalist mission, the embracing of things Irish and the rejection of West Britonism.⁷⁰ This phenomenon was also manifested in the use of songs that celebrated the cause of Irish nationalism or commemorated the achievements of major figures from the Irish nationalist iconography in the post-game social setting. The entertainment that followed the football game between the Dublin club, McBride-Mitchell's and Westmeath, played in May 1905, for instance, included the signing of songs such as *Wrap the green flag round me*, *The thirty-two counties* and *A nation once again*.⁷¹

Cultural nationalism was also associated with a growth in the number of musical bands of the brass and reed variety, a development that facilitated and was facilitated by the popularity of hurling and football tournaments. As shown earlier, the relationship became transposed on one notable occasion when the Mullingar Brass and Reed Band became the first promoter of a football tournament in the town, a tournament that initiated the process of re-constituting the GAA in the county. These events provided an ideal venue for musical combinations to display their talents and provided an additional layer of entertainment at the tournaments. Some of these provided an entire entertainment experience. An event held at Rochfortbridge in November 1903 had as its feature event a football match between the Rochfortbridge Warriors and Cullion Celtics but also included two donkey races, an athletics programme and during the intervals 'the Milltown Pass Fife and Drum Band played a choice selection of Irish airs'.⁷² The Mullingar Shamrocks and Clara hurling game featured entertainment by two bands. Clara arrived at Mullingar railway station

⁶⁹ O'Growney was a Catholic priest and Gaelic League pioneer with Westmeath connections.

⁷⁰ Cronin, 'Enshrined in blood', 18, 1, 1998, 96.

⁷¹ *WE*, 13 Oct. 1905.

⁷² *WE*, 21 Nov. 1903.

accompanied by their own band where they were met by the Mullingar INF band, which escorted them to O'Connell's hotel. After the refreshments both bands played the teams to the Dublin Road grounds of Mullingar Shamrocks.⁷³

The Irish-Ireland movement was exclusionist and the GAA at national level introduced a series of rules that reflected the national mood and that evolved between 1901-05 to exclude those who supported games that were defined as foreign. The introduction of the exclusion rules has been variously interpreted. W.F. Mandle has linked the upturn in nationalist sentiment in the GAA to the influence of the IRB, who he believed had returned to the GAA in an attempt to re-establish itself. In an undoubted overstatement of the extent of IRB involvement and a failure to take into account the prevailing cultural nationalist mood, Mandle considered that the 'there was not a man who meant anything in the organisation of the GAA who was not of the Brotherhood'.⁷⁴ The increased support offered by the GAA for nationalist causes has been correctly identified by Paul Rouse as a reflection of the increased nationalist enthusiasm within Ireland as a whole.⁷⁵ When individuals such as Michael Cusack, T. F. O' Sullivan, Maurice Moynihan and Dan Fraher delivered trenchant speeches, at the annual GAA congress, that supported a variety of nationalist issues and causes, they spoke in harmony with the credo of an increasingly broader sector of Irish society and one that increased in importance rapidly in the new century.⁷⁶

The GAA wasn't the only organisation that allegedly defined 'cultural identity as a matter of negation and exclusiveness'.⁷⁷ In the early 1900s, the world of Irish dance was convulsed with a debate, conducted through the columns and letter pages of the Gaelic League newspaper, as to which dances were acceptable as Irish. The attempt to define a canon of Irish dance precipitated 'a cultural civil war with dance as the arena of combat'.⁷⁸ The outcome was that four-and-eight-hand-reel figure dances were

⁷³ *WE*, 10 Oct. 1903.

⁷⁴ Mandle, 'Sport as politics', 114.

⁷⁵ Paul Rouse, 'The Politics of Culture and Sport in Ireland: a history of the GAA ban on foreign games 1884-1971. Part One: 1884-1921, in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 10, 3, 1993, 348-9.

⁷⁶ Brendan MacLua, *The steadfast rule; a history of the GAA ban*, Dublin, 1967, 39-41.

⁷⁷ R.F. Foster, *Paddy and Mr Punch: connections in Irish and English history*, London, 1993, 25.

⁷⁸ Helen Brennan, *The story of Irish dance*, Dingle, 1999, 31. 29-43 for a detailed account of this particular debate.

excluded from Irish dance competitions because of their supposedly foreign origins.⁷⁹ In excluding certain activities as foreign, nationalists, according to Comerford, were engaging in a process of invention. Definition of the nation by selective rejection was one the key ways in which nationalists contributed to nation invention.⁸⁰

The upshot of this nationalist fervour was that the GAA had in place by January 1906 a rule that specifically excluded certain individuals from membership and prevented its members from participating in sports defined as foreign. The principle of what became popularly known as the Ban was established at the national convention of 1901 when county 'committees were empowered to disqualify and suspend members of the Association who countenance sports which are calculated to interfere with the preservation and cultivation' of national pastimes. Over the next three years the rule evolved, so that by 1905 GAA members were forbidden by rule to play or promote cricket, rugby, hockey and soccer, the games that were defined as foreign. Police and military were also excluded from membership of the GAA.⁸¹ The Westmeath county committee adopted the rule at its annual meeting held in early February 1905.⁸²

The impact of this ban at a local level is difficult to assess particularly as its implementation was confined to the final years of this study. In Tipperary, according to Bracken, its introduction 'was the death knell for cricket'.⁸³ Bracken equates the decline of rural cricket with the introduction of the ban. The cultural milieu of the time was far more important in establishing loyalties than any institutionalised restriction. GAA clubs in Westmeath that included soccer players in competitive games went unpunished by the controlling body. Moate Football Club who objected to the inclusion of a soccer player in the Cullion Celtic team that defeated them in the Young Ireland tournament lost their case despite the strong evidence they presented. At this stage there was no period of exclusion that a returning player of 'foreign sports' was required to serve before becoming eligible to participate in GAA games. Athlone were ordered to re-play their hurling championship match against Ringtown

⁷⁹ Ibid, 33. When these dances were included in a county Mayo dance competition a correspondent to the *Mayo People* newspaper was prompted to ask 'Is it possible that in Gaelic Mayo there are some who still hanker after the fleshpots of Egypt'.

⁸⁰ R.V. Comerford, *Inventing*, 220.

⁸¹ MacLua, *Steadfast rule*, 43-8.

⁸² *WI*, 18 Feb. 1905.

⁸³ Bracken, *Foreign and fantastic*, 120.

in 1905 as they had included a soccer player but on appeal to the higher authority of the Leinster Council, the secretary ruled that the player had 'a perfect legal right to play as he had not played soccer since November, 1904'.⁸⁴ Mobility between the sports concerned certainly decreased but the potential for interchange was lessened by the reduction in the number of cricket clubs and the changed seasonality of Gaelic sports.

The establishment of a county committee in 1904 brought an organisational structure to the playing of football and hurling in the county.⁸⁵ Formalised competition was introduced with the establishment of championships in both codes from 1904. Four clubs entered the 1904 hurling championship and seven for that of 1905. The football championship attracted an entry of seven and eighteen clubs in 1904 and 1905 respectively.⁸⁶ The management of these competitions formed the main business of the county committee. Draws were made and fixtures set. Objections to claimed illegalities were investigated and judgements handed down. Financial solvency was a critical factor in the survival of the sporting club and the county committee made some attempt to assist in GAA club's finances. At the second meeting of the county committee held in early April 1904, as well as adopting the exclusion rules as part of the county bye laws, the committee decided that gate receipts for county championship matches were to be divided equally between the host club, the county committee and the competing teams.⁸⁷

The role of organised competition in popularising sport has been well documented.⁸⁸ Participation in competitions provided an added layer of meaning to a club's *raison d'être*. In addition to being part of a broad cultural nationalist movement, club members now had the opportunity of making a meaningful contribution to the promotion of local identity and pride. Cricket remained a recreational activity and never developed a competitive structure within the county. GAA players and clubs

⁸⁴ *MR*, 7 Oct., 1905.

⁸⁵ *WE*, 5 March 1904. Seven clubs (Mullingar Hurling Club, Mullingar Young Irelands, Rochfortbridge, Newbrook Wanderers, Cullion Celtics, Athlone, Castlepollard Hurling Club) attended this meeting and three more (Moate, Ballymore, Riverstown) sent letters of support.

⁸⁶ *WI*, 25 March 1905.

⁸⁷ *WI*, 9 April 1904.

⁸⁸ Pierre Lanfanchi, Christine Eisenberg, Tony Mason and Alfred Wahl, *100 years of football: the FIFA centennial book*, London, 2004, 21-22.

were integrated into the practices of modern sport; the members of cricket clubs still displayed many of the characteristics of pre-modern sport as defined by Adelman.⁸⁹

The change in the relationship between the four team-sports in terms of games played between 1880-1905 is illustrated in Fig. 23. In the period covered in this study, 1905 was the watershed year in the relationship between the sports. In that year, football was the most popular game played with eighty-nine games reported and it featured more matches than any previous year since the formation of the GAA in 1884. Even more significantly, more hurling matches were played than either soccer or cricket matches. The change in the respective popularity of the sports happened quickly, as 1900 was the year of cricket's peak in popularity in terms of games played. The playing records of hurling and football clubs at this period are illustrated in Appendices 12 and 13.

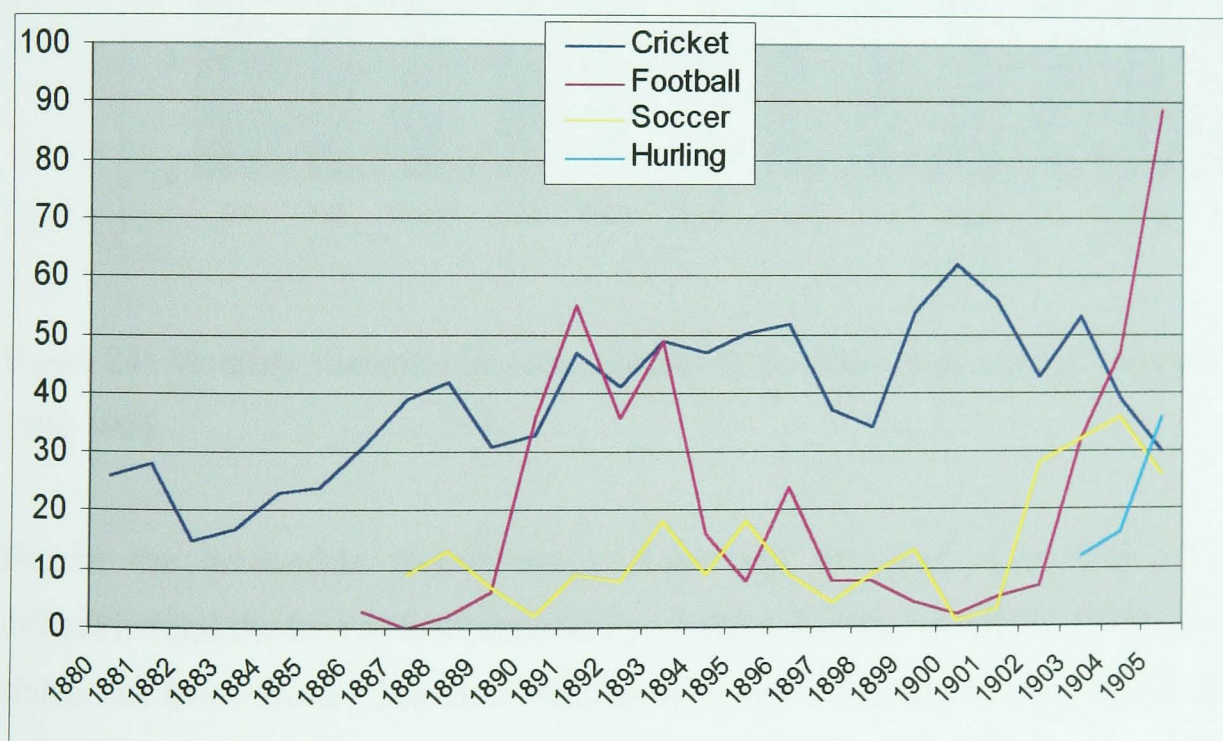


Figure 23: Number of games played in cricket, football, hurling and soccer in county Westmeath, 1880-1905.

There was also a significant change in the playing season of football (and hurling) and this change also challenged cricket's dominance. In the previous chapter, it was

⁸⁹ Adelman, *A sporting time*, 6.

shown that football was essentially a game played over the winter and spring months with 81 per cent of matches played between November and April in the period 1890-93. An analysis of football matches played between 1904-5 shows that football was now an all-year round activity but with a significant peak in the March-July period as illustrated in Fig. 24. In 1903-05 the proportion of games played between November and April was reduced to 47 per cent. This change in seasonality presented a challenge to the dominance of cricket by providing a competitive alternative to recreational cricket over the summer months.

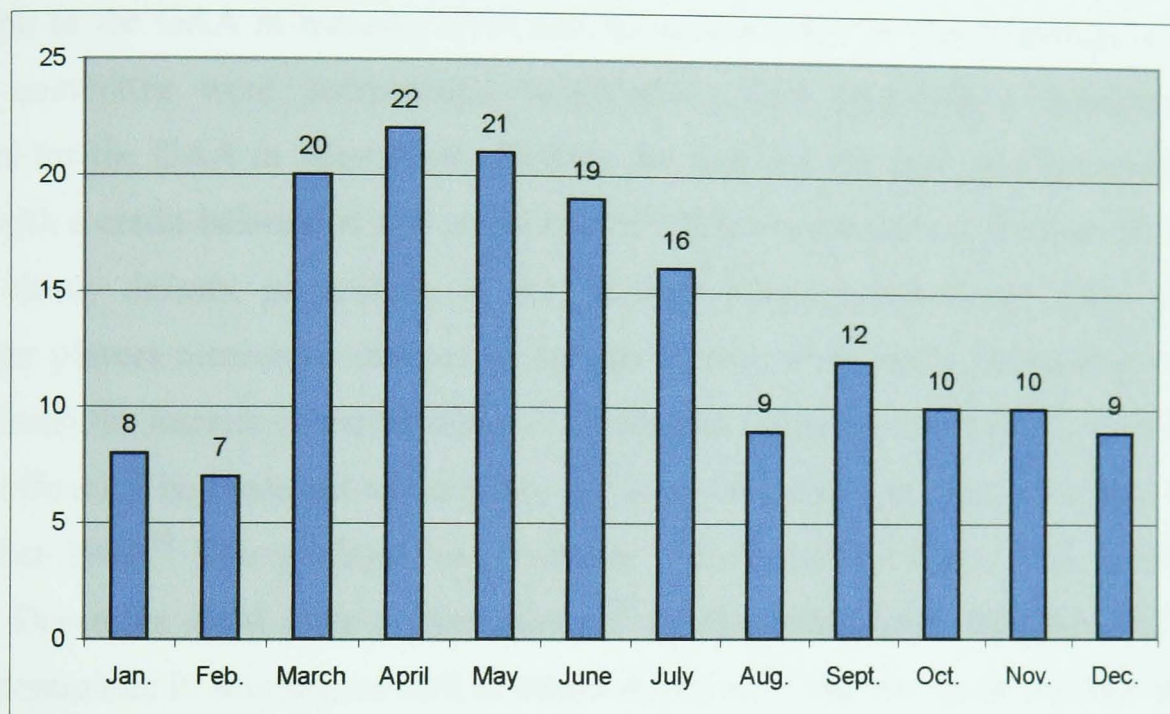


Figure 24: Monthly variation in total number of football games played in the period 1904-1905.

Despite the favourable factors many clubs still struggled to survive. Financial difficulties and the loss of key personnel presented insurmountable obstacles for some clubs. The Brian Boru Club from Ballymore competed in the Young Ireland football tournament as a gesture of support for the venture but were unable to meet their commitments to a replay. 'No funds were on hands to defray expenses'. The distance to Mullingar, the difficulty in securing conveyance, 'the generally bad state of the weather and principally the absence of funds provided insuperable difficulties'.⁹⁰ It was felt that 'the general members of a country club, like Ballymore, cannot well

⁹⁰ *WE*, 27 Feb. 1904. The distance from Ballymore to Mullingar was approximately eighteen miles.

contribute the necessary amount to keep funds to working level'.⁹¹ This episode illustrates the class dimension to Westmeath sport. At the same time as the Ballymore footballers couldn't afford to travel to Mullingar, the members of the Westmeath Golf Club were able to raise sufficient funds to erect a clubhouse at their Prospect course.

The fate of the Mullingar Young Ireland club provides a clear example of the potential transience that was latent in the sports club that catered for the lower social orders. The tournament hosted by the club in Mullingar in February 1904, its affiliation to the GAA at national level and its agitation for the establishment of a county committee were instrumental in promoting and providing a formalised structure for the GAA in Westmeath. Despite the fact that the club was financially viable with a credit balance of £14 at the end of 1904, the season was the last of the club.⁹² Heavy defeats, particularly in the Goodwin Cup against Cavan when the Mullingar players received a number of serious injuries were partly responsible for undermining the interest of the members.⁹³ Death and migration deprived the club of its key officers. The President of the Club, Joe Garry was killed in a train accident in September 1903.⁹⁴ Young player and treasurer and community leader Jack Dunne died in December 1904 after a short illness.⁹⁵ Club captain, and chairman of the county committee P. Murphy, as well as others migrated.⁹⁶ The end result was that the most influential club in the formative period of the GAA in the early 1900s did not affiliate in 1905 and a new club the Mullingar Football Club was formed in June 1905.⁹⁷

Social profile of football and hurling players

The purpose of this section is to carry out a detailed examination of the players who were involved in football and hurling clubs in the early 1900s. The names of players that appeared for six hurling clubs listed in the newspapers for the 1903-5 period were collated and analysed. These clubs were equally balanced between rural and urban

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² *WE*, 20 Aug. 1904.

⁹³ *WE*, 28 May 04; *WE*, 3 Nov. 1904. This edition carried a report on the last game played by the club when they were heavily defeated by the Riverstown Emmett club. This club was to dominate the Westmeath football championship for the next decade.

⁹⁴ *WE*, 12 Sept. 1903, 19 Sept. 1903, 6 Oct. 1903.

⁹⁵ *WE*, 24 Dec. 1904.

⁹⁶ *WE*, 18 June 1904.

⁹⁷ *WE*, 8 June 1905.

and included St Ciaran's Club, Athlone, Mullingar Shamrocks, Ringtown Myles O'Reilly's, Castlepollard Sarsfields, Simonstown Gaels and Delvin Hurling Club. In total 124 names were listed and eighty-two were positively identified representing 66.12 per cent of the total. The analysis of the members of these clubs by socio-economic class is illustrated in Table 33.

The social status of hurling players was far less inclusive than cricket. The majority of hurlers, 47.56 per cent, were from social class C in origin. A further 35.37 per cent, mainly farmers' sons, were from class B. Only one in six (17.07 per cent) of all hurlers were farm or unskilled labourers and these were members of the Delvin and Ringtown clubs. White collar, lower middle class socially ambitious shop assistants and clerks dominated the game particularly in its urban setting.

The typical hurling player was also slightly older than his cricket-playing counterpart with an age that ranged between fifteen and thirty-four. In 1905, the average age of a Westmeath hurler sampled was 24.96 years of age. With the exception of the Devlin player who averaged 22.42 years, the average age of the individual player of the other clubs displayed a remarkable consistency and ranged between 25.33 and 26.12 years of age. Despite the importance of some knowledge of the skills of the game 81.25 per cent of the players were natives of Westmeath with representatives of twelve other counties represented in the sample. In terms of place of origin, the Mullingar Shamrocks displayed the greatest diversity of origin with eight counties represented apart from Westmeath. This was a reflection of the extent to which the club was dominated by clerks and shop assistants who found employment in Mullingar. As with the other team sports that catered for the lower social classes hurling was the preserve of the single man with 98.73 per cent of players single.

	B	Bi	Bii	Biii	C	Ci	Cii	Ciii	D	U
Delvin Hurling Club	8	1	6	1	0	0	0	0	6	4
Simonstown Gaels	4	-	-	4	0	0	0	0	1	3
Castlepollard HC	1	-	-	1	15	2	11	2	2	7
Athlone Hurling Club	3	-	-	3	5	1	4	0	0	10
Mullingar Shamrocks	6	2	4	0	17	5	11	1	1	13
Ringtown HC	7	-	-	7	2	2	-	-	4	5
Total	29				39				14	42

Table 33: Social class of county Westmeath hurlers, 1903-1905.

The dominance of social class C and the low level of representation of social class D is a product of culture and finance. The appeal of the Gaelic League was mainly to the lower middle classes and was particularly attractive to shop assistants, clerks and teachers for reasons of recreation and socialisation. It also fulfilled needs that were partly psychological.⁹⁸ Members of this social class formed the majority of hurling players in the county and suggest that the ideology of the Gaelic League had significant impact in producing urban-based hurlers. Individual biographies support this suggestion. Patrick Brett, the President of the Mullingar Shamrocks hurling club, was one of the few individuals involved in 1902 who had been involved in the original version of the GAA in the early 1890s. Since that time he had progressed in his business career, advancing from a shop assistant to the proprietor a drapery store in Mullingar. For much of that time, Brett had no GAA involvement. It was only when the post-1900 Gaelic League inspired cultural nationalist movement began that he re-discovered his zeal for hurling and football. Hugh Burke held important administrative positions in both organisations. In 1903, he was secretary of the Gaelic League branch and vice-president of Mullingar Shamrocks hurling club.⁹⁹ Newly qualified Athlone lawyer, J. J. Walsh, was an advocate of the Gaelic League and was in the process of establishing a hurling club at the time of his death. The role Gaelic League activist Patrick Nea played in the promotion of hurling has been outlined earlier in this chapter. The Gaelic League had little impact or appeal for the general

⁹⁸ Garvin, *Nationalist revolutionaries*, 85-90. Hutchinson, *Cultural nationalism*, 179.

⁹⁹ *MR*, 12 Feb. 1903.

labourer or unskilled labourer in the urban areas and as such this group were deprived of the cultural capital that encouraged young men to participate in hurling.

This exclusion also had an economic dimension. Hurling was a game that required some financial input as individual equipment was required to play the game. Hurleys had to be purchased and were liable to be broken in the course of a game. Cricket was far more accessible to the labourer as one communally owned bat was sufficient to allow a match to take place. Shop assistants, clerks and teachers were better off financially and their working environment allowed for ease of organisation. Working in offices, workshops and shops meant constant contact with fellow workers, customers and neighbours.¹⁰⁰ The close relationship between shared places of employment and residence has been pointed out earlier in relation to the Mullingar and Castlepollard clubs.

In football the situation was somewhat different. In this examination, a database of 201 football players who represented ten rural clubs in a championship game between 1904 and 1905 was constructed. The identities of 141 (70.15 per cent) of these were established. In addition a database of 165 urban-based players was compiled of which ninety-five (57.57 per cent) were identified. The players involved ranged in age between fifteen and thirty-four years of age and had an average age of 23.57. The rural clubs were dominated by farmers' sons and farm labourers who formed social class B and D respectively. Farmers or farmers' sons formed 50.36 per cent of the total and farm and general labourers 40.43 per cent. Thirteen (9.21 per cent) footballers were from class C, where skilled tradesmen dominated. Six of these were attached to the Riverstown Emmett club and included three Leech brothers who were returned as sailors and worked as boatmen on the Royal canal. In contrast, footballers from social class C dominated the urban sample forming 61.45 per cent of the total, with class B at 22.91 per cent next in importance. Over half of this group were farmer sons who were members of the Athlone Volunteer club. The average age of the urban footballer at 23.52 years was similar to his rural counterpart. With regard to religious affiliation and conjugal status footballers were almost homogeneous. Nine footballers were married and only three members of the Church of Ireland were evident from the

¹⁰⁰ Peter Hart, *The I.R.A. at war 1916-1923*, Oxford, 2003, 132.

sample. The analysis of the members of these clubs by socio-occupational class is illustrated in Table 34.

In both the urban and rural situation football had a greater significance in catering for the recreation of the general and farm labourer. Given the social structure of rural Westmeath and the isolated nature of farm-based employment, it is suggested that there was a work related dimension to the composition of the rural football club. Farm labourers who were involved in football clubs may have been employed on the family farm of the farmers' sons who were involved in the same club. Of the urban clubs, the number of labourers involved distinguishes the Moate and the St. Patrick's club. The cost factor allowed farm labourers to become more involved in football than hurling and the purchase of personal equipment wasn't an essential requirement for participation.

Name	B	Bi	Bii	Biii	C	Ci	Cii	Ciii	D	U
Rural Clubs										
Ballymore	12	-	4	8	1	-	1	-	1	7
Cullion Celtics	5	-	-	5	1	1	-	-	5	14
Collinstown	5	-	-	5	2	1	-	1	6	3
Coosan	11	-	-	11		-	-	-	2	3
Derrymore	4	-	-	4		-	-	-	9	5
Graftonstown	3	-	1	2	2	2	-	-	7	6
Lacken Rovers	6	-	-	6	0	-	-	-	6	5
Riverstown Emmetts	7	-	-	7	6	6	-	-	11	8
Tubberclare	12	-	-	12	0	-	-	-	4	4
Thomastown Rovers	6	-	-	6	1	1	-	-	6	5
Total Rural	71	-	-		13	-	-	-	57	60
Urban Clubs		-	-	-		-	-	-		
Mullingar Young Ireland	1	-	-	1	25	5	15	5	1	14
St. Patrick's	1	-	-	1	9	7	1	1	6	16
Moate	5	-	2	3	8	8		-	14	10
Athlone Volunteers	8	-	1	7	17	2	14	1	1	29
Total Urban	15	-	-	-	59	-	-	-	22	69
Total	86	-	-	-	72	-	-	-	79	129

Table 34: Social class of footballers in Westmeath, 1898-1905.

Conclusion

This chapter has offered a different perspective on the development of sport at the local level to that presented in the other chapters of this study. The revival of the GAA and its associated games of hurling and football emerged as part of the cultural nationalist movement that became increasingly important in post-1900 Ireland. The spread of the GAA from 1901 onwards, as de Burca has correctly identified, was part of the general revival of the nationalist movement that began around this time.¹⁰¹ This movement towards the creation of an Irish-Ireland had a significant impact on the recreational habits of the young men of county Westmeath. Hurling and football provided an opportunity for the young men of the county to engage in sporting activity that was politicised and for some rural residents the opportunity to engage in an alternative recreational pastime to cricket. This had the additional advantage in that involvement enabled participants to define themselves as Irishmen. The formation of hurling and football clubs also provided those who may have been excluded from the cricket community an opportunity to engage in sports. Cricket's dominant position in rural Westmeath was challenged and overtaken, in particular by football, in 1905.

Maurice Davin was the least politically motivated of the founding fathers of the GAA and became involved in the new organisation in 1884 for sport-related reasons. He believed in the need for games 'especially for the humble and the hard-working who seem to be born into no other inheritance than an everlasting round of labour'.¹⁰² This group formed the majority of the constituency that benefited from the growth of cricket in Westmeath between the decline of the GAA in the post-1894 years and its re-emergence in 1903. There is evidence from this analysis that this economic group may have been disenfranchised in a sporting context by the post-1900 developments. Although the GAA at national level, by including two disparate sports under its organisational umbrella, unwittingly created a movement that catered for the recreational needs of the lower middle and working classes, the evidence from Westmeath suggests that the latter group were significantly outnumbered. Representatives from social classes B and C, dominated by farmers' sons and white-collared clerical workers and shop assistants, dominated the GAA playing cohort. The combined total of Westmeath hurlers and footballers formed 71 per cent of these

¹⁰¹ De Burca, *GAA*, 87.

¹⁰² Mandle, *Gaelic Athletic Association*, 5.

classes with class D forming 29 per cent of the total. Cricket at this time, catered chiefly for the farm labourers of social class D and as Vincent Comerford has perceptively suggested 'the disappearance of horizontal divisions within Cusack's organisation was to take time'.¹⁰³

There was also a spatial dimension to the emergence of the post-1900 GAA as a comparison of the maps that illustrate the location of clubs in the 1890s and 1900 indicate. North Westmeath, where there was little evidence of GAA activity in the 1890s, was now an area where several clubs, in both hurling and football were active.

¹⁰³ Comerford, *Inventing*, 219.

Conclusion

The key finding that emerges from this study is the extent to which sporting involvement was a product of the class structure of Westmeath society. Developments within the county were typical of those in the wider world as the most recent study of Victorian sport has claimed that the ‘Victorian sporting experience was largely a product and a reflection of social class...class was a major fault line in sporting culture’.¹ In Westmeath, social class largely determined the type of sport played as well as the age, gender and conjugal status of the individual involved. The detailed socio-occupational analysis of sportspeople in Westmeath from 1850-1905 has revealed that different classes in general were involved in their own separate sports and that participation by the un-skilled and semi-skilled in the new ‘commercial sports’ developed from the 1880s onwards was non-existent. Table 35 summarises the social class characteristics of the individual participants for the main sports examined in this study and provides the quantitative evidence for conclusions relating to the class characteristics of the different activities. The illustrated pattern has been examined in depth in the individual chapters and the sample size is sufficiently large to formulate valid conclusions

Sport	Sample size	A %	B %	C %	D %	Av. age
Cricket (1900-02)	227	1.3	26.0	25.12	47.58	24.63
Cycling (1891-98)	48	20.84	14.58	64.58	-	27.72
Football (1892-1905)	357	-	37.53	31.37	31.10	22.07
Golf (1904)	83	86.77	12.02	1.21	-	39.68
Hunting (1900)	114	86.84	13.16	-	-	44.67
Hurling (1904)	82	-	35.37	47.56	17.07	24.96
Polo (1905)	70	100	-	-	-	46.51
Soccer (1900-04)	75	-	28	49.33	22.67	22.55
Tennis (1890-1901)	92	96.73	1.09	2.18	-	38.55

Table 35: Social classes of individual participants of main sports.

¹ Huggins, *Victorians*, 19.

Hunting was totally dominated by members of social class A until the mid-1880s when a number of wealthy 'bona fide' farmers became eligible and accepted membership of the Westmeath County Hunt Club. Sports such as polo, golf and tennis remained the almost total preserve of the aristocracy and gentry and the members of the higher status professions comfortably positioned in social class A. This finding is remarkably similar to that of Tranter for central Scotland despite the different structures of the economies of the two districts.² The social origins of cricketers were the most varied of the sports examined. It was the sport that underwent the most extraordinary metamorphoses during the period of this study, as it changed from an activity confined to the landed gentry in the 1850s to one in whom all male classes participated by the end of the century, and was dominated by the farm labourers of social class D. It was the only sport availed of by all classes, although by the end of the century gentry participation was limited to individual challenge or novelty events. Cycling's appeal for the lower middle classes is confirmed by the evidence from Westmeath where over six out of every ten cyclists, mainly shop assistants and clerks, were members of social class C. It also had some appeal for the higher status professionals of social class A. The physical contact sports of football, soccer and hurling drew roughly 70 per cent of their participant base from classes B and C. In the urban context, these were the shop assistants and clerks and the skilled tradesmen while in the rural context class B was dominated by farmers' sons whose economic status and flexibility of work arrangements allowed greater freedom than that of the labourers of class D to participate in sport. The evidence from this study suggests that the GAA organised sports didn't provide the same recreational opportunities for the labouring classes as cricket supplied. The implication of this tentative finding for both the history of the GAA and the wider history of recreation is a topic worthy of further investigation.

Social class also influenced the average age of participants and their conjugal status. The average age of the participants and the age range they exhibited suggests that for some from social group A involvement in sport and ancillary socialisation was life long. These individuals by means of their wealth, social status and educational backgrounds were able to access age appropriate sports. Seventy-seven per cent of the

² Tranter, *Sport, economy and society*, 40-41; also Tranter, 'Social and occupational structure', 308-11.

hunting subscribers identified in 1900 were married for instance. At the other end of the social scale sport was overwhelmingly the preserve of the young and single man. The conjugal status was partly a product of the age profile of the participants. Delayed marriage characterised the demographics of nineteenth century rural Ireland.³ The age profile of hurlers, footballers, soccer and cricket players was of the age group that remained largely unmarried. In Westmeath, in 1901, only one individual from a total of 3,210 in the 15-19 age group was married and of the 20-24 age group only 2.67 per cent was married.⁴ However, marriage brought responsibilities and new financial obligations to a group with limited disposal income. Lifestyle decisions had to be made that restricted recreation, a process that did not impact on the higher social classes. In Belfast, 35 per cent of the young men who played professional football for remuneration continued their involvement in the game after marriage.⁵ Clearly the financial implications of marriage impacted on the lower social classes' lifestyle choices.

Tennis, of the sports examined in this study, was the one that displayed the greatest devotional identity with individual membership confined almost exclusively to members of the Church of Ireland community in which several of the participants were active in church administration. Golf was far more accessible to the Catholic professional and the denomination formed forty-two per cent of the identified sample. There was a strong Catholic presence amongst the hunting community throughout the period.⁶ Cricket almost exactly replicated the religious structure of the population as a whole in the county. In general, the religious mix exhibited by the participants in the football codes and hurling is comparable with the religious make up of the social classes who were the main participants.

The sports club provided the institutional framework about which sporting participation was managed and organised. In numerical terms, the sports club was the most important vehicle for socialisation and the maintenance of social networks in the

³ Timothy, W. Guinnane, *The vanishing Irish: households, migration, and the rural economy in Ireland, 1850-1914*, Princeton, 1997, 193-240

⁴ *Census of Ireland, 1901*, Based on calculations from detail on conjugal status of different age groups, 54.

⁵ Garnham, *Association football*, 95.

⁶ The Dease, O' Reilly and Nugent families were Catholic as were several of the substantial farmers who joined in the 1890s.

county. They heavily outnumbered self-help organisations, voluntary, temperance and political societies.⁷ A key finding of this study is the relationship between the lifespan of a club and its financial circumstances. This is also a function of the class structure. Essentially, clubs with a more middle-class membership were more stable institutions and the secular fluctuation in their membership was less pronounced.⁸ The clubs established in Westmeath, that catered for the recreational pleasures of the upper and middle classes, had emerged at the end of the century as stable and established institutions. The members could afford the financial investment to acquire a specialised permanent and privatised location that was specifically used for sport and ancillary entertainment, develop a basic pavilion, employ a caretaker or maintenance person to maintain the facilities, and on occasion, hire professional expertise to teach the basic skills of the sport. Financial challenges experienced by these clubs could be overcome in a variety of ways that included increased membership and entrance fees, sourcing donations from wealthy patrons, the operation of bank overdrafts, retrenchment, and in the case of the Westmeath Hunt Club, the recruitment of a wealthy benefactor as master. Inability to gain access to an appropriate venue or the loss through migration or death of key individuals was also critical in bringing about club demise. These factors in particular were key factors in the demise of several clubs that catered for the sporting interests of the lower social classes.

This examination of Westmeath sport has provided important insights into the recreational habits of women. Social class was critical in influencing participation. Although the numbers involved were small and confined to the upper and middle classes some Victorian and Edwardian Westmeath women were more dynamic and active participants in sport than the accepted norm would permit.⁹ There is evidence from Westmeath that women participated in at least fourteen different sports that included individual sports such as archery, athletics, tennis, badminton, table-tennis, golf, croquet, cycling; the field sports such as hunting, fishing and shooting and team sports such as hockey and as a novelty event, cricket.¹⁰ Divorcee Mrs Locke and her two daughters, Mrs Batten and Flo Locke were competent point-to-point riders and

⁷ At least 340 different sports clubs, of varying longevity, were identified in the period covered by this study. This number is far greater than other political and social organisations.

⁸ Tranter, 'Chronology', 379.

⁹ For Irish attitudes to women's participation in sport in the 1880s see Rouse, 'Sport', 18-20.

¹⁰ *WI*, 4 Sept 1886. The Athlone Woollen Mills athletic sports of 1886 included a girls' race in which eleven girls competed for the prize of 3s. and 2s.

had a number of winning rides to their credit.¹¹ It has also been suggested that one Westmeath lady was responsible for the introduction of archery to Ireland.¹² In some of the activities women were competitively involved and the range of disciplines involved demanded various degrees of courage, stamina, strength and skill from the participants.¹³ Women were full and active participants in hunting and were frequently commended for their ability. Stamina, strength, skill and courage were all required in the high-speed chases that epitomised the hunt and several Westmeath women established their status as high calibre sportswomen in these chases. Undoubtedly, the suggestion of Hargreaves that the sportswoman at the end of the century was a submissive creature who avoided over-exertion and bodily display and ‘represented the embellishment of man’, typified the involvement of many Westmeath women in sport, but some were also active and competitive and were prepared to travel extensively to satisfy their competitive instincts.¹⁴ These were the women whose personal circumstances allowed them to ignore contemporary attitudes and restrictive conventions.

Tony Collins has suggested in his study of rugby league football that ‘periods separated by relatively short spans of time can be profoundly different, especially as perceived by the participants themselves, a fact which is especially true of late Victorian sport’.¹⁵ A similar summation can be used in relation to the GAA evidence that has emerged from this study. The foundation of the GAA in 1884 was partly inspired by the contemporary demands for legislative independence and land reform and represented an attempt to establish an Irish model for managing, codifying and promoting athletics, football and hurling. The split in the constitutional nationalist movement, difficulties arising from the takeover of the association by the revolutionaries of the IRB and associated Catholic Church opposition brought about the demise of the GAA in the early 1890s. The GAA collapsed because it was devoid of any cultural support structure to counteract the loss of political stimulation. A decade later circumstances had changed dramatically as the GAA re-emerged buoyed

¹¹ *British Hunt and Huntsmen*, 415-416.

¹² Lawrence, *Handbook*, 1867-68. Lawrence credited Mrs Smyth of Gaybrook, near Mullingar, for the introduction of archery to Ireland. In the company of Mr Lambert of Beauparc and Mr Napier of Loughcrew they established the Meath Archers in ‘about’ 1833.

¹³ Parratt, ‘Athletic womanhood’, 144-45.

¹⁴ Hargreaves, *Playing like gentlemen*, 43.

¹⁵ Collins, *Rugby’s great split*, xiii.

by the development of cultural nationalism that promoted the concept of Irish-Ireland. This study has identified the importance of this development in Westmeath and its impact in creating a sense of national identity in which the playing of games identified as Irish were centrally significant. The Gaelic League played a key role in the creation of this sense of identity and personnel associated with the organisation were important ambassadors of hurling to certain districts in the county. Hurling and football challenged the dominance of cricket in rural Westmeath. The latter activity was now disadvantaged through its strong negative associations with West-Britonism. Hurling in Ireland is regionally demarcated and the extent to which this is a product of the presence or absence of a Gaelic League activist is an area worthy of further investigation. Discontinuity is a key feature of GAA history, and the evidence presented in this study would suggest that the long-term impact of the post-1900 cultural nationalist inspired movement, is of greater significance than the events of the 1884-94 era. The real watershed in GAA inspired recreational practice is a product of the revival of the organisation and not of its inception and in Westmeath 1905 is the key year in this revival.

The important role played by military garrisons in the promotion of Irish sport has been a recurring theme in the limited analysis devoted to Irish sports history. This perception resulted in cricket and soccer in particular achieving a popular identity as garrison games. Generalisations on the ambassadorial role of the military in recreational matters have been made without any supportive quantification. The conclusions from this Westmeath study are based on empirical data. Army officers used sport as a means of achieving integration into the social networks of local landed society that allowed them to continue uninterrupted a lifestyle that revolved around participation in field sports in particular. Military importance in local cricket declined as the century progressed and by the time cricket was targeted for its anti-national characteristics, army involvement had virtually ceased in the county. Soccer had replaced cricket as the popular sport with army personnel. The presence of two garrisons in Athlone played a crucial role in the popularisation of soccer in that town in the 1890s. Their role in the diffusion of the codes and regulations of the sport and its tactical nuances were critical. Army teams provided regular opposition for civilian teams and as a result Athlone teams competed without rancour and successfully at provincial level in the 1890s. Disputes created by unfamiliarity with Gaelic football

codes precipitated the decision of the core group of Athlone soccer players to withdraw from the GAA in 1893.

Players for golf, tennis, cricket and soccer teams were occasionally recruited from Athlone and Mullingar based regiments. Army officers were recruited to the post of MFH the most important position available in nineteenth century sport. Clubs also benefited financially from military association. Regimental donations and the subscriptions of individual officers were important sources of finance for race and regatta organisers as well as polo, hunting, tennis and golf clubs. Specific fund raising events such as drama promotions were organised by regiments. At the most basic level, regimental bands provided much of the musical entertainment that was an integral part of the sporting occasion.

The centrality of sport in creating a social life for its practitioners is clearly evident from this study. Sport became the conduit for socialisation that took place outside the boundaries of the field of play and provided an 'after life' beyond the sporting event. The winter months, for landlords and their families, were dominated by hunting. The central importance of hunting to the lifestyles of the elite is clear from Lady Fingall's statement that 'if you didn't hunt in Meath you might as well be dead'.¹⁶ The winter social diaries of hunting devotees revolved around hunt meets, point-to-point and race meets, attendance at social occasions hosted at the residences of similarly minded families and culminated with the hunt ball, the annual social highlight for county society. Polo from the 1880s enabled a similar process of socialisation to continue over the summer months, for many of the hunting fraternity. The new sports of the 1880s and 1890s provided an additional layer to this process. The development of tennis made possible the development of a summer social calendar that was inclusive of all family members for the landed gentry and was a critical factor in its popularity at the time. John Lowerson has highlighted the importance of this aspect of sport for the middle classes but it was important for all classes that were involved in recreation. The social activities organised around the football match was an important part of the culture of the stable GAA club. One of the attractions of football, when it was introduced in the 1890s, in the county, was that it allowed participants to maintain and

¹⁶ Fingall, *Seventy years young*, 98.

extend social networks that had been developed over a summer of cricket involvement. The post-match meal and entertainment was a central element of the early football clubs activities, particularly the more successful ones, and may have had a limiting effect on membership. Participation in these rituals as well as transport costs to away matches required that those involved had some disposable income available for investment in recreation. Cultural nationalists of the early 1900s found the socialisation associated with cricket and soccer objectionable for as Patrick Maume has suggested they 'endangered national virtue through socialisation with anti-national elements'.¹⁷

This study makes an important contribution to sports historiography in that it examines sports development in a society characterised by declining population that was devoid of significant industrialisation. Neither of these factors proved inimical to sporting development. Neither was peripheral location an obstacle to sporting innovation and opportunity. The landed gentry of social class A as members of 'a supra-national class' that embraced the whole of the British Isles were quickly introduced to the latest recreational innovation. Mobility was a characteristic feature of this class and evidence from surviving diaries confirm this facet of gentry lifestyle and the variety of recreational activities experienced by individuals from this class on their frequent trips to England.¹⁸ The result is that such was the commonality of interest between the leading elements of society that developments in Westmeath were similar in many instances to UK wide recreational and sporting developments. In the range of sports experienced, the impact of codification, increased commercialisation of sport and sports centrality to the socialisation process, geographic peripherality provided no barrier to progress. The range of sports institutionalised in club form is illustrated in Appendix 14.

This study has endeavoured to provide a comprehensive examination of the development of Westmeath sport but space constraints precluded the exploration of a number of important themes. In the introduction reservations were expressed at the

¹⁷ Maume, *Long gestation*, 53.

¹⁸ The diaries of Laeda Reynell (1862) and of Mary. B. Sommerville (1860-1902) and of H.S. Tottenham of Tudenham in particular provide evidence of the mobility and the continuous socialisation that surrounded sports events for this particular class of society. I am grateful to Marian Keaney for drawing my attention to these sources.

extent to which Irish sports history is dominated by political investigation. In the course of this research a number of examples of Westmeath hunting being targeted for political protest were revealed. There is an opportunity to examine the extent to which hunting interference was used as a vehicle for political agitation in the post-Land League situation. Space constraints also prevented an examination of the development of water based recreational activities.

Many people in the period covered by this study experienced sport as spectators and the multi-dimensional importance of this outlet in the lives of the different classes and genders requires exploration. Popular occasions of entertainment such as fairs and patterns and the more private occasions of celebration such as weddings and wakes had been considerably curtailed in the immediate pre-Famine period.¹⁹ The concept of the fair was transformed during the nineteenth century from a cultural and economic event that stretched over a number of days to a one day event whose primary purpose was commercial.²⁰ In the second-half of the nineteenth century, with the curtailment of the traditional forms of entertainment, access to a sporting event and to the racecourse in particular, provided one form of popular entertainment and celebration. The racecourse was a cross-class, multi-dimensional entertainment venue that offered free entry to the majority of spectators. Race meetings provided the excitement of the races, carnivalesque celebration, displays of wealth and privilege, opportunities for drinking and faction fighting, and the opportunity to experience a variety of formal and informal entertainment. For one local observer the racecourse was a venue for 'buffoonery, deception, double dealing and disorder' a day when there seemed to be 'a traditional licence for indulgence'.²¹ The course provided relief for the masses from the hardship of rural life and brightened 'the humdrum every day life in the country'.²²

¹⁹ Stiofan O' Cadhla, *The Holy Well tradition: the pattern of St Declan, Ardmore, county Waterford, 1800-2000*, Dublin, 2003.

²⁰ Seamus O' Maitiu, 'Changing images of Donnybrook fair' in Denis A. Cronin, Jim Gilligan, & Karina Holton (eds.), *Irish Fairs and Markets: studies in local history*, Dublin, 2001, 165-6. A more detailed account of the Donnybrook Fair is found in O'Maitiu's, *The humours of Donnybrook: Dublin's famous fair and its repression*, Dublin 1995. For an account of popular religion practices in Westmeath see Paul Connell, *The Diocese of Meath under Bishop John Cantwell, 1830-66*, Dublin, 2004, 235-62.

²¹ *WI*, 17 June 1899.

²² *WI*, 31 May 1902.

Another theme worthy of exploration is the impact of sport on the business and economy of the county. As the surviving quantitative data is imprecise and fragmentary, it is impossible to determine the exact amount of capital invested in sport and the number of people employed and their earnings. Nevertheless, it is possible to make some evaluation of the economic importance of sport. Sport was potentially profitable to several sectors of the embryonic sport industry according to Huggins.²³ In Westmeath the increased importance of sport as the century progressed amplified its economic significance. The development of commercial sports provided new retail opportunities for owners of drapery, hardware and ironmongery stores. By the end of the century at least one specialist bicycle store had opened for business in Athlone and Mullingar. Newspaper proprietors advertising revenue increased. Any attempt to interfere with the sanctity of hunting was normally challenged by newspaper letters from apologists that stressed the economic importance of the sport to the county. In 1897, it was estimated that £12,050 was annually expended on hunting alone. This excluded the actual cost of living and rent of people settled in the county and the contribution made by people who lived in the county because of the quality of its hunting. In fifty years, in excess of £600,000 had been invested in hunting in the county, it was claimed. Horses regularly hunted had their value increased. The annual Horse Show, the hunt ball and the three race meetings owed their origin and maintenance to hunting in addition to 'the profits made and the money circulated by horse breeding, training and selling'.²⁴ In 1902, T. F. Levisgne estimated that both directly and indirectly the expenditure on hunting was between £20,000 and £30,000 annually in the county.²⁵ A number of people were employed to service the growing needs of sports club members and participants. A.J. Pilkington and James Cheshire earned a living as horse trainers. At the time of his retirement in 1900, Will Matthews earned £250 annually as huntsman to the Westmeath Hunt Club. Less formal employment was available to golf caddies, golf course attendants, stablemen, hunt servants such as earth-stoppers, boatmen and builders, yachting hands on the Shannon and Lough Ree, tradesmen who prepared temporary stands for race

²³ Huggins, *Victorians*, 112. For a detailed exploration of the economic impact of sport see *ibid*, 111-138. Also Tranter, *Sport, economy and society*, 20-22. The most detailed economic history of Victorian sport is Vamplew's *Pay up*.

²⁴ *WE*, 6 March 1897. This letter sought to encourage reluctant subscribers to increase their subscriptions beyond the minimum £10.

²⁵ *WE*, 22 Nov. 1902.

meetings, ticket collectors at race meetings and earth stoppers for the hunting fraternity.

This study has provided an important insight into the role played by sport in the recreational habits of all sections of Westmeath society during the Victorian and early Edwardian periods. The evidence produced provides a major contribution to the historiography of Irish sport and sport in general. It is the first study of its type to empirically examine sports development and participation rates in the Irish context, at the level of the county.²⁶ Until we have more detailed local studies of the type attempted here it will not be possible to provide quantitatively based generalisations on the characteristics of Irish sporting development. The history of Irish sport at both national and local level has been a neglected aspect of Irish historiography and this study therefore makes an original and key contribution to our knowledge of sport in a local context. The themes chosen have also been expansionary. In the introduction to this thesis the extent to which Irish sports historiography has been dominated by political considerations was outlined. This examination has adopted a non-political approach to the subject and concentrated on the social dimension. As a result our knowledge of the socialisation process at local level and the workings of social networks has been considerably enhanced. This approach is clearly seen in Chapter Five and Chapter Six as the non-political adoption of Gaelic games is examined, the links between Gaelic games and cricket are considered, and the importance of the games to the socialisation process is explored.

The study provides a template against which similar local studies on the development of sport may be measured and contextualised. The absence of local and regional studies of Irish sport has more than likely distorted the true picture of the nature of Irish sports development. Meaningful qualitative second-order comparative study must depend on carefully researched local studies.²⁷ The research of a number of such

²⁶ Daniel Gerard O'Sullivan, 'Sport, leisure and class in Cork, 1870-1939', unpublished M.Litt. thesis, NUI Galway, 2002. This thesis attempts an analysis of the development of sport in Cork but adopts a different approach to the one used in this study. It makes greater use of club minute books and tends to concentrate more on the elite involvement in sport. The study of cricket in Cork aimed to 'look at the growth and development of the sport in general during the later decades of the nineteenth century and earlier decades' but depended almost totally on the Cork County Cricket Club and as a result the focus is on the development of elite cricket. 616-80. The study is qualitative rather than quantitative in nature.

²⁷ Speak, 'Social stratification', 43.

studies can provide the foundation material for the national synthesis of Irish sports history.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Importance of agricultural and recreational horses in nine selected counties in Ireland in 1901.

County	Acreage	Number of agricultural horses	Number of recreational horses	Recreational horses as % of total horses
Meath	577,735	15,699	2129	11.94
Dublin	226,784	22,202	2931	11.66
Kildare	418,497	12,774	1471	10.33
Westmeath	454,104	11,502	1031	8.22
Limerick	662,973	16,003	1072	6.28
Cork	1,838,921	55,539	2962	5.06
Tipperary	1,050,172	29,950	1641	5.19
Antrim	711,666	32,832	1246	3.65
Down	312,113	33,152	1285	3.73

Appendix 2

Land farmed by 'bona fide' farmers who were members of Westmeath Hunt Club.

Name	Land held	Valuation £	Number of units held
Ballesty, Michael	266.1.27	227.10.0	3
Brabazon, Alfred	789.2.18	715.5.0	3
Brabazon, Robert	270.1.35	188.7.0	5
Cleary, Patrick	179.0.0	136.0.0	1
Hope, Michael	531.2.13	317.16.0	3
McLoughlin, William	553.0.18	329.10.0	9
Mitchell, Frank	280.3.31	166.10.0	8
Murray, William	577.0.16	419.5.0	3
Ronladson G.V.	366.0.20	261.5.0	1
Salmon, Eugene	256.1.0	183.5.0	4
Taaffee, James	143.0.17	113.5.0	6
Taaffee, Christopher	118.0.9	95.0.0	1
Taylor, James	424.3.30	379.18.0	8

Appendix 3

Races held, number of horses running and prize-money available in Ireland 1860-70.

Year	Races	Horses Running	Prize-money
1860	337	556	20654
1861	352	640	20915
1862	272	538	17661
1863	265	550	15693
1864	287	625	18217
1865	346	717	19321
1866	322	738	19212
1867	333	660	20979
1868	369	674	22048
1869	419	770	25385
1870	397	845	27041

Source: *Racing calendar* 1878, 541-2.

Appendix 4

Identified shareholders and directors of Westmeath (Mullingar) Racing Company Limited.

Name	Year	Occupation	Political positions	Other information
Bannon J. C.	1890	China/glass dealer		Shareholder
Berry William	1890	Butcher	Pres. MCCC	Shareholder
Branigan James				
Briscoe ETF	1891	Gentry		
Burke Mr				Shareholder
Cleary Patrick	1905	Auctioneer		Director 1895
Daly P	1893	GSD	Chairman Town Commissioners	
Dillon-Kelly	1894	Doctor		Shareholder
Doherty George T	1901	Butcher		Shareholder
Donohoe James	1890	Auctioneer		Shareholder
Dowdall Jos. P	1890	Leather seller	County Council	Director
Downes Christopher	1890	Baker/Confect.		Director
Downes N.J.	1890	Lawyer	Vice-Ch. Co.Co.	
Downes Robert	1890	Farmer	Ch. Co.Co.	Director
Doyne James	1892	Milliner/Dress maker	JP & TC	Shareholder
Fetherstohaugh Capt. C.	1890	Gentry		Director
Fetherstonhaugh Thomas A.	1893	Gentry/lawyer		
Gordon John W	1890	Draper		Director

Greville Lord	1890	Aristocrat	MFH(1886-93)	Director
Hayden John P	1896	Newspaper proprietor	MP.	
Henehan Ml.	1893	Grocer, spirit dealer (GSD)		
Kellaghan James	1892	Ironmonger	TC	Shareholder
Kerrgian L	1890	Doctor	Coroner	Shareholder
Lock James H.	1892	Industrialist		Director 1892-4
Lucas V.	1894	Bank manager		
Malone J.R.Col	1903	Gentry	DL	Director
McCormick Michael	1890	GSD		
McDonnell Jos	1895	GSD		
Newburn Walter	1891	Land steward		
Nooney T.F.	1890	Hardware mcht		Director
Nugent Walter Sir	1905	Aristocrat		Director
O'Reilly P. P.	1891	Gentry/Land agent	Director MGWR	Shareholder
Purcell B. J.	1893	GSD/Wine importer		
Rogers Hubert	1893	Boot maker		Shareholder
Salmon Eugene	1890	Farmer		Director
Sullivan Owen	1890	GSD	PLG	Director
Thomas W. J.	1893	Insurance agent		Shareholder
Weymes Maurice	1894	Wool merchant		Shareholder
Smyth Ralph Capt.	1890	Gentry		Director
Mullally James	1895	Baker & confectioner		Shareholder
Maguire Patrick	1896	Boot & shoe maker		Shareholder

Appendix 5

Number of races run, available prize-money, number of horses running and average prize-money available per horse in Irish racing, 1890-1905.

Year	Races	Horses running	Prize-money (£)	Prizemoney per horse (£)
1890	638	1105	39,524	35.16s.
1891	603	1095	39,144	35.15s.
1892	596	1081	40,185	37.4s.
1893	617	1169	40,407	37.4s.
1894	669	1448	41,313	28.11s.
1895	636	1289	42,023	32.12s.
1896	636	1277	42,370	33.4s.
1897	626	1293	42,852	33.3s.
1898	629	1282	43,746	34.2s.
1899	623	1346	45,926	34.2s.
1900	622	1239	46,678	37.14s.
1901	674	1245	51,281	41.4s.
1902	720	1328	61,324	46.4s.

1903	715	1282	60,960	47.11s.
1904	708	1315	57,524	43.15s.
1905	711	1223	57,087	46.14s.

Source: *Racing Calendar*, 1897, p.197 1905, p.185.

Appendix 6

Cricket combinations active in Westmeath in the 1880s.

	1880	1881	1882	1883	1884	1885	1886	1887	1888	1889
Asylum XI								1		
Athlone Brass Band XI							1			
Athlone Commercial Club				3			9			
Athlone Woollen Mills							3		2	
Ballinagall		2								
Ballinagall 2 nd XI		1								
Ballyhealy CC					3			2		
Balrath CC					2		2	3		
Belvedere CC							1	1		
Bracklyn CC					1					
Bunbrosna			1							
Bunbrosna CC		2								
Carrick CC							1		2	
Castlepollard	6	2								
Castletown-Geoghegan									1	5
Cloghan CC							1			
Clonhugh									4	1
Clonickavant 2nd XI								1		
Clonickavant XI						3	3	6	3	1
Clonkill								1		
Clonlost CC							2		2	
Coolamber CC							2	4	6	4
Coolure CC						1				
Delvin CC					3	4			1	
Drumcree								1		
Farra School CC		3		1		1				
Gaybrook							1	1		
Graftonstown CC					1	3				
Hodgestown CC					1				3	
Kenny CC								1		
Kilbeggan CC		1								
Kilbeggan CC					1				3	1
Kilbeggan Home Rule CC										1
Kilbeggan Home Rule junior									2	1
Kilbeggan National CC										5
Kilbride CC								3	3	3
Killucan Juvenile CC						1				
Killula Castle								1	1	1
Knockdrin		1						1		1

Larkfield CC							1	2	1	
Master Percy O'Reilly XI						2				
Moate CC					4	3	4	3	3	4
Moate juvenile CC									1	1
Moortown							1			
Mountain CC							1			
Mr Corcoran's XI								1		1
Mr Dease's XI		2								
Mr Hannon's XI						1				
Mr Tottenham's XI										2
Mr Waters XI		1								
Mr Young's XI		1								
Mullingar CC				1						
Mullingar Commercial Club	2				6	1			1	
Mullingar Juvenile CC						1				
Mullingar Shamrocks								2	7	5
Mullingar Wanderers								1		
Mullingar Wanderers Junior								2		
Ranelagh School CC				2		2			3	3
Rathcolman CC									1	
Rathowen CC						2	2	5		
Ringtown CC								2		
Riverstown CC		1						3		
Riverstown CC									4	
Riverstown Mills	1									
Sonna CC		3	1	1						
Tudenham Park										2
Turbotstown CC				1			2	3		
Turin							1			
Turin 2 nd XI								1		
Walshestown CC				1				1	2	
Wardenstown	1				2	3				
Westmeath		16	15	7	9	3	2	2	5	
Westmeath Polo XI								1		

Appendix 7

Cricket combinations active in Westmeath in the 1890s.

	1890	1891	1892	1893	1894	1895	1896	1897	1898	1899
Athlone Commercial Club							1			
Athlone Cricket Club									1	
Athlone Woollen Mills			2	5	2	2	2	1		
Ardnaglue										1
Ballinagall	1	3	6	2					3	
Ballinagall 2 nd XI										
Ballinderry						1				1
Ballyhealy CC				2						
Balrath CC						1				
Bracklyn CC				1		1	7	2	2	1
Bracklyn CC 2 nd XI							1			
Bunbosna		1								
Capt. Daniel's XI				1						
Capt. Lewis's XI				1						
Carrick CC	2									
Castlepollard				1	3	3				4
Castlepollard 2 nd XI										1
Castletown-Geoghegan										
Cloghan CC			6	5	1	1			2	5
Clonhugh				3	5	4				
Clonickavant XI		1								
Clonlost CC				9	2		2		1	2
Clonlost Juvenile CC										2
Clonlost 2 nd XI								1		1
Collinstown	1	1		4	2	3	1			
Coolamber CC	3	1	2	4	2	5	3	1		
Craddinstown CC										4
Crookedwood									4	1
Crookedwood juvenile										1
Crowinstown CC			2	1						
Cullion CC		3								
Delvin CC						5	3			2
Donore CC			2							
Drumcree				3						
Fennor CC	1				1	7	5			1
Gaulmoylestown				1			2			
Gaulstown CC							1			
Gillardstown CC		2		1						
Gilbertstown CC								1	1	
Graftonstown CC								3		
Griffinstown CC				1	1					
Hodgestown CC			1	2	2				4	2

Hodgestown CC 2 nd XI								1		
Independent Wanderers			1							
Kilbeggan CC		5				6	3	7	8	7
Kilbeggan CC 2 nd XI							1			1
Kilbeggan National CC	6	1					5	4		
Kilbride National CC 2 nd XI							1			3
Kilbeggan Rovers		2	1							
Kilbeggan Willow CC									2	3
Kilbride CC					2			1		
Kilbride CC 2 nd XI									2	
Killadoran CC					3					2
Killucan CC								2		5
Killucan Station CC									2	3
Killucan Workingmen's Club										1
Kilbride National CC				1	3	6	1			
Kilshrewley CC								2		
Kiltoom CC							1	2	3	3
Knockdrin	3					1	5			
Knockmant										3
Larkfield CC	4	4	4		3	2			5	5
Loughgar CC	1									
Moate 2 nd XI			2		1					
Moate CC	3		3	1	5	8	5	2	8	
Mount Street CC										6
Mountain CC	1	14	6		2					3
Mr Bailie's XI			1							
Mr E. Dames-Longworth XI			1							
Mr Lyons's XI						1				
Mr Kiernan's XI						1				
Mr Locke's XI		1				1				
Mr Tottenham's XI										
Mr Pilkington's XI						1				
Mr. P. P. O'Reilly's XI			2					1		
Mullingar Asylum XI	1		1							
Mullingar CC				3	2					
Mullingar Commercial Club			4			1				
Mullingar Wanderers			1							
Multyfarnham		5	2							
Newtown CC	2					1				
Raharney CC							3			
Ranelagh School CC	3	1	3		3		1	7		
Rev. H St George									1	
Reynella CC						2		8		
RIC			1							
Ringtown CC	2		6	2	9	1	3	3	1	3
Riverstown CC										2
Riverstown juvenile										3
Robinstown							2	1		

Stonehall CC				3	4			1	
Rochfort CC		2			1				
Shaw's XI									2
Stonehall									2
Stonehall Workingmen's club									1
Stoneyford									1
Taughmon CC				3	4			2	
Thomastown									3
Tuberquill	1								
Tullaniskey CC			1						
Turbotstown CC					3	1			
Turin					1	2	3	3	7
Tyrrelspass					1				2
Tyrrelstown CC	2	1		3					
Tyrrelstown CC 2 nd XI				1					
Wardenstown	1	4	2					3	5
Westmeath	6	8	3		8				

Appendix 8

Cricket combinations active in Westmeath, 1900-05.

	1900	1901	1902	1903	1904	1905
Addinstown				2	1	4
Ardnagluie	1	1				
Ballinea				1		
Belmont CC						1
Belvedere CC					1	
Boher CC		4				
Bracklyn CC		2	7	1		
Bracklyn juvenile XI			1			
Carrick CC	2					
Carrick juvenile CC		1				
Castlepollard	5	3	8	9		
Castlepollard 2 nd XI						
Castlepollard Commercial CC	3	4				
Castlepollard Wolfe Tones CC	5	6				
Castlepollard Workingmen's Club	1					
Mr C. Clibborn's XI		1				
Cloghan CC	4	10	8	9	3	5
Clonmore			1	1		
Clonhugh		1	5	7	6	3
Clonhugh 2 nd XI					2	
Clonhugh juniors				2		
Clonlost CC			5	5		
Cloonagh CC	1	3	2	2		3
Collegians (St Mary's Coll.)						2

Coolamber CC				2		
Craddinstown CC	4	4	1	2		
Crookedwood					4	
Crowinstown CC			2		1	1
Dalystown					4	2
Delvin CC	2		4			
Derryrow CC	1	2				
Donore CC						2
Fennor CC	2				4	
Fore CC	1					
Fr Matthew Hall XI						2
Gainstown						1
Gaulmoylestown	1		1			
Gibbonstown						1
Gilbertstown CC					4	
Graftonstown CC	1					
Griffinstown CC						
Hodgestown CC	6					
Kilbeggan CC	13	5	2	3	1	7
Kilbeggan Willow CC	3					
Kilbride CC	3			2	1	7
Kilbride CC 2 nd XI						
Killadoran CC		3	2	2		
Killucan CC	1	1				
Killucan Workingmen's Club	1					
Kilbride National CC	1					
Kiltoom CC	3	2	2	1	3	
Larkfield CC	3	2	1			
Leney					1	
Leney 2 nd XI					2	
Little Island				2	3	1
Lismacaffry				1		
Lord Longford's XI						1
Martinstown				6	3	
Moate CC	1	6	3	1		3
Mooretown		2				
Morningtown CC	1		1			
Mount Street CC	8	2	1			
Mountain CC				4	3	
Miss Montgomery's XI			1			
Miss Levigne's XI			1			
Mr Charter's XI		1				
Mr Eastwood's XI				1		
Mr Ludlow				1		
Mr Montgomery's XI		1	1			
Mr Murray's XI		3				
Mr Tottenham's XI					1	
Mr Russell's XI		1				

Mrs O'Reilly's XI				1		
Mrs Dease's XI				1		
Multyfarnham				4		
Newtown CC	1					
Pakenhamhall	3	1	1	2	1	
Patterson's XI (C'pollard)			1			
Raharney CC		2				
Ranelagh School CC					1	
Ringtown CC	2	3		1		
Stonehall CC	5			2		
Simonstown				1		
Stonehall		2		2		
Taughmon CC			1	3		
Turbotstown CC			2	8	3	3
Turin	2	2	1			
Tyrrelspass	8	2		1	1	
Tyrrelstown CC		1				
United Banks XI						1
Wardenstown	4		2			

Appendix 9

Clubs and membership of GAA in Midlands division of RIC 1889-1892 as documented in police reports.

	1889	1890	1892
Kildare	38/1900	38/1980	19/480
Cavan	37/2750	38/2640	39/1500
King's	22/1190	20/1050	6/180
Leitrim	21/980	25/1260	12/360
Longford	13/580	25/1000	26/1030
Meath	36/1900	14/930	9/350
Sligo	25/1660	18/1300	15/500
Westmeath	9/460	5/290	12/503

Appendix 10

Football combinations active in Westmeath in the 1890s.

	1890	1891	1892	1893	1894	1895	1896	1897	1898	1899
Athlone T.P. O' Connors	4	1	4	4						
Ballinahown	2	3		2			2			
Ballinalack Erin go Bragh			1							
Ballinalack Sally Pickers				1						
Ballinalack Inny Rangers					1	3	3	1		1
Ballinea			1							
Ballyancaragy Abbey Rovers								1		
Bunbosna			1							
Castletown-Geoghegan Volunteers								2		
Cloghan				2						
Cloneyheigue							2	1		
College Rovers								1		
Coralstown Campaigners							1			
Corbetstown Home Rulers		7	5							
Corbetstown Home Rulers II			1							
Cullion Celtics	1	5	5	4	2	3	2			
Downs Pigeons					1					
Fox Covert Rangers		1								
Frewin										1
Gainstown Home Rulers									2	
Gaulstown Park Lovers of Erin				3	3	2	2			
Glasson	2									
Greville Street										2
Independent Sexton Club			1							
Independent Wanderers		1	4							
Kilbeggan Emeralds				3						
Kilbeggan Nationals	6	1								
Kilbeggan Nationals II	1	1								
Kilbeggan Wolfe Tones							3			
Kilbride					3		2			
Killucan	1									
Killucan Emmett's				5						
Killucan Emmett's II				1						
Kinnegad Slashers	9	3	2	4			1			
Kinnegad Slashers II	4	2								

Lacken Golden Flags			1	1			1			
Larkfield										1
Lynn Mallards								1	1	
Milltown										1
Moate (The Gap)		1								
Moate (The Turnpike)	1									
Moate John Dillon's		2								
Moate Parnellites		1								
Moate Shamrocks		1								
Moate Stars of Erin			3				4		2	

Moate Young Emmetts									1	
Moate William O'Brien's	4	2								
Mount Street								1		2
Mullingar Commercial	2	5								
Mullingar Football Club		5	8	10	4	2	4			
Mullingar Football Club II		1	1	3						
Mullingar Shamrocks	5	7	3	5	1					
Mullingar Shamrocks II		3	1	3						
Multyfarnham Stars			4	4						
Newbrook Wanderers		1		2						
Portloman Rackers							1			
Raharney Rovers	4	7	5							
Raharney Rovers II		2								
Rathwire Sir Charles Russell's	4									
Rathwire Leaguers					2					
Rochfortbridge Erin's Hopes				4	1					
Robinstown							1			
Springfield Wanderers								1	1	
St. Patrick's								4	1	
Tang									1	
Thomastown Rangers	5	19								
Thomastown Rangers II	3	1								
Tubberclair									1	
Tyrrelstown					2					
Walshestown				2	1		1			
Wooddown Rackers			3	10	3				1	
Wooddown Rackers II				2						
World Recorders								1		
Young Irelanders			4							

Appendix 11

Naming policies of Westmeath GAA clubs 1903-05.

Name	Code	Political or local relevance
Athlone St Ciaran's	Hurling	A locally celebrated saint
Athlone Volunteers	Football	A part-time military force established in 1778-9.
Ballymore Brian Borus	Football	Leader at Battle of Clontarf, 1014
Brownstown Clan na Gael	Football	Irish-American revolutionary organization formed to pursue Irish Independence after 1867.
Castlepollard O'Growney's	Hurling	Gaelic League activist with Westmeath connections
Castlepollard Sarsfields	Football	Patrick Sarsfield was the Irish commander on the Jacobite side in Williamite War (1689-1691).
Clonlost Croppy Boys	Football	1798 Rebellion
Coosan Fenians	Football	Fenians: organised the 1867 rebellion
Cullion Celtics	Football	
Delvin Hibernians	Football	
Derrymore St Patricks	Football	Celebrated national saint
Graftonstown Shamrocks	Football	
Inny Gaels	Football	
Inny Rangers	Football	
Kilbixy Gaels	Football	
Kiltoom Cruicilawee	Hurling	Microtoponym
Kinnegad Slashers	Football	
Lismacaffry St Fintan's	Football	Locally celebrated saint
Moate Invincibles	Football	Assassins of chief secretary in Phoenix Park, 1882.
Mooretown Myles the Slashers	Football	Local historical figure
Mullingar Shamrocks	Hurling	
Mullingar Young Irelanders	Football	1848 rebellion organisers
Ringtown Myles O'Reilly's	Hurling	Local historical figure
Riverstown Robert Emmetts	Football	Organiser of 1803 rebellion
Simonstown Michael O'Dwyers	Hurling	Figure associated with 1798 rebellion
Stoneyford Confederates	Football	Confederate War (1641-55) association.
Stoneyford Fitzgeralds	Football	Lord Edward Fitzgerald had 1798 involvement although he died before the rebellion.
Thomastown Rangers	Football	
Tubberclare O'Connells	Football	Daniel O'Connell democratic leader 1820s-1840s.
Wooddown Pigeons	Football	Microtopnym

Appendix 12

Playing activities of Westmeath hurling clubs 1903-05.

	1903	1904	1905
Athlone, St Ciaran's	0	2	12
Castlepollard O'Growney's	0	8	9
Mullingar Shamrocks	12	6	12
Ringtown Myles O'Reilly's	0	7	6
Simonstown Michael Dwyer's	0	0	6
Lismacaffry St Fintan's	0	0	3
Kiltoom Cruicilaweas	0	0	3
Delvin	0	1	6
Westmeath County	0	2	1

Appendix 13

Playing activities of Westmeath Football Clubs, 1900-1905.

	1900	1901	1902	1903	1904	1905
Athlone			1			
Athlone Volunteers					2	12
Ballinalack Rebels	1					
Ballinalack Inny Rangers						9
Ballymore			2	2		
Ballymore Brian Borus					2	1
Ballynacargy						1
Brownstown Cossacks					1	
Brownstown Clan na Gael						6
Castlepollard Celtics				1		
Castlepollard O'Growneys						3
Castletown-Geoghegan		1				
Clonmellon						2
Clonlost Croppy Boys						5
Collinstown Celtics					3	6
Coralstown Camapigners					2	
Coosan					2	
Cullion Celtics				10	4	10
Dalystown				1		8
Delvin						1
Delvin Juveniles						1
Derrymore, St Patricks					2	
Erin's Hopes (Ballynacargy)	1					
Fore, St Feichin's					1	
Glasson					1	
Gibbonstown Prosperities						1
Glenidan Wanderers					1	
Graftonstown					1	15
Shamrocks/Fitzgeralds						
Graftonstown Juveniles						1

Inny Rovers						3
Kinnegad Slashers		2		1	1	4
Kilbixy Gaels					1	7
Kilbride Volunteers						3
Lynn Ramblers						2
Midland Rovers					2	
Milltown Hardly Ables						1
Moate Stars of Erin					2	
Moate Young Invincibles			3	1		
Moortown Slashers					6	7
Mount Street	1	2				
Mullingar Football Club						6
Mullingar Independent Wanderers				1		
Mullingar Shamrocks				2	3	
Mullingar Young Irelanders				11	4	
Mullingar Young Irelanders II				1	2	
Multyfarnham College Boys				1		
Multyfarnham Donore Castles			1	4		
Multyfarnham Confederates					1	
Multyfarnham Stars						2
Pakenham Rovers				1		
Raharney Stars				2		
Rathcolman			2	4		
Riverstown Emmetts					5	11
Rochfortbridge Warriors		4		6	7	2
Rochfortbridge Warriors II					2	
St Mary's Temperance Soc.	1					
Stoneyford Rovers						4
The Downs						1
The Pigeons						1
Thomastown Rangers					1	2
Tubberclare O'Connells					1	8
Tyrrellspass					1	1
Wooddown Rackers				2		
Wooddown Pigeons					1	5
Westmeath					5	3

Appendix 14

Introduction of various sports in an institutionalised form in Westmeath.

Sport	Club formed/event organised
Angling	1885
Archery	1833
Athletics	1877
Badminton	1895
Coursing	1896
Cricket	1852
Croquet	1894
Cycling	1882
Football	1885
Golf	1892
Hockey	1896
Hunting	1854
Hurling	1902
Lawn Tennis	1884
Polo	1881
Racing	1731
Rowing	Pre-1850
Rugby	1879
Soccer	1887
Table Tennis	1901
Yachting	c.1770

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